

REPUBLICAN UNIVERSALISM  
AND RACIAL INFERIORITY:  
PAUL BONNETAIN AND THE  
FRENCH MISSION TO CIVILIZE  
IN TONKIN

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of History  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

John Malcolm Greenshields

## **PERMISSION TO USE**

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The name of © Copyright John Malcolm Greenshields was exclusively created to meet the thesis and/or exhibition requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Saskatchewan. Reference in this thesis to any specific commercial products, process, or service by trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise, does not constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the University of Saskatchewan. The views and opinions of the author expressed herein do not state or reflect those of the University of Saskatchewan, and shall not be used for advertising or product endorsement purposes.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other uses of materials in this thesis/dissertation in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of History  
9 Campus Drive, 721 Arts Building  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan [S7N 5A5]  
Canada

OR

Dean  
College of Graduate Studies and Research  
University of Saskatchewan  
107 Administration Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A2  
Canada

## ABSTRACT

Paul Bonnetain (1858-1899) is a French author whose work has been largely forgotten. While the literary merit of much of his output is another matter, this thesis will show that the value of Bonnetain's work is of considerable historical significance as a record of the ways in which the apparently contradictory notions of republican universalism and racial hierarchy were combined to form the French *mission civilisatrice*. The focus will be on Bonnetain's two books gleaned from his time spent in Indochina as a correspondent for *Le Figaro* during 1884-1885, the compiled journalism of *Au Tonkin* (1884) and the Naturalist colonial novel *L'Opium*. Both books exemplify the historical interest of Bonnetain's work, which lies in its Naturalist quest for scientifically accurate literature and in its belief in the phenomenon of racial degeneration. This belief is coupled with a strongly implied materialist adherence to polygenism – the belief that human races represent different species with distinct origins. However, these aspects of his work are brought into even greater relief by their juxtaposition with Bonnetain's strongly leftist, anti-clerical, and materialist republican universalism. This thesis describes how his enthusiasm for miscegenation and *métissage*, as expressed in *Au Tonkin* and *L'Opium*, allowed him to maintain a belief in racial hierarchy while also enthusiastically subscribing to republican universalism. In this way, *métissage* served as a framework in which these two seemingly contradictory positions could be held together.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without my wife Tomoko the writing of this thesis could never have been attempted. Words cannot express my gratitude. Second only to Tomoko, I must thank my advisor Dr. Mark Meyers. His willingness to take on this project made it possible, and his kindness and guidance, not to mention his seemingly endless patience, have been invaluable to my development as a historian and as a human being. I would like to thank my father and mother-in-law, Dr. Junichi Saga and Mrs. Hisae Saga, whose generous support has strengthened my resolve and made it possible for me to pursue this degree. I would like to thank Dr. Colleen Fitzgerald for her friendship, guidance, generosity and understanding, all of which saved me from utter despair. I would like to thank Dr. Chris Kent for his willingness to listen and his consistently helpful suggestions, and Dr. Michael Hayden for his generous offer to read (and make sense of) this thesis in its gangly adolescent phase. Dr. Hayden's suggestions were very welcome, and almost universally adopted. I would like to thank Dr. Laurence Kitzan and Dr. Dale Miquelon for their helpful questions, suggestions and insights, many of which shaped aspects of this thesis. In particular, Dr. Kitzan's own work has proven very useful. Last but far from least, I must thank my parents, whose lifelong support has enabled me to develop the positive aspects of myself. I would be nothing without you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 The Life and Times of Paul Bonnetain .....	3
1.2 Bonnetain in Recent Scholarship .....	7
2. CONTEXTS .....	11
2.1 Polygenesis .....	12
2.2 Civilizing the Inherently Inferior .....	24
2.3 Conclusions .....	36
3. BONNETAIN, ZOLA AND DEGENERATION .....	39
3.1 Science and Literature .....	41
3.2 Degeneration .....	47
3.3 Popular Racialism .....	59
3.4 Conclusions .....	61
4. EXOTICISM AND THE NATURALIST COLONIAL NOVEL .....	64
4.1 French Exoticism .....	67
4.2 Pierre Loti and the Colonial Expansion of the Third Republic .....	73
4.3 Enter Bonnetain .....	78
4.4 Gendered Confusion and Lamarckian Condemnation .....	85
4.5 Métissage .....	95
4.6 Conclusions .....	97
5. CONCLUSION .....	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	106

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the ways in which contemporary ideas about race, literature, and republicanism shaped the views expressed by the pro-colonial Naturalist author Paul Bonnetain (1858-1899). The concepts of racial degeneration, and republican universalism, as well as the debate between monogenism and polygenism – the theories of single and multiple origins of the human species, respectively – will be shown to be central to Bonnetain’s understanding of the French colonial *mission civilisatrice*.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Bonnetain’s two book-length works on Vietnam, *Au Tonkin* (1884) and *L’Opium* (1886), will be carefully considered in order to determine how Bonnetain, an outspoken materialist, thought the “superior” French “race” could civilize the “inferior” Vietnamese “race.” Bonnetain’s work will be shown to be a valuable record of the ways in which pro-colonial French commentators used the concept of race, to justify the colonial expansion of the fin-de-siècle with liberal republican ideology. The importance of *L’Opium* as the first Naturalist colonial novel will also be explored, with a focus on the ways in which it married the Naturalist trope of racial degeneration with the *mission*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Polygenesis* and *monogenesis* refer to the phenomena, whereas *polygenism* and *monogenism* refer to the beliefs in the respective phenomena. Both theories had many variations, all of which were conceived of within “the confines of Biblically inspired discourse.” While monogenists typically supported the Biblical view that all human beings had a common ancestor (Adam), polygenists such as Bonnetain argued in opposition to this ideology. In Bonnetain’s case, this was very much in line with his republican anti-clericalism. See further discussion on pp. 18-19. (Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1968), 94).

*civilisatrice* of the Third Republic, and the ways in which it confronted the issue of “métissage,” a topic which was largely avoided in contemporary colonial literature.<sup>2</sup>

The thesis will be divided into five parts: an introduction, three main chapters and a conclusion. The introduction provides a short history of Paul Bonnetain’s life, writings and intellectual development and discusses his place in recent scholarship. The first chapter will explore the ideological and political contexts of Bonnetain’s pro-colonial position regarding Indochina, focusing on the arguments made famous during the summer of 1885 by Jules Ferry and Georges Clémenceau, for and against colonial expansion respectively. It will be shown that, while Ferry’s rhetoric in particular was responsible for popularizing the pairing of republicanism and polygenesis in French thought, Clémenceau’s arguments also paid credence to the superiority of the French as both a nation and a “race.” The second chapter presents Naturalism as it was conceived of by Émile Zola, and shows the ways in which the work of his disciple, Bonnetain, resembled that of Zola in its desire to apply the positivist ethos to literature. In the famous formulation of Zola’s own mentor Hippolyte Taine, this ethos would privilege “race, milieu, and moment” in its purportedly scientific approach to literature.

Bonnetain’s most famous novel, *Charlot s’amuse* (1883), will be considered briefly to illustrate the extent to which Bonnetain took this positivist calling to heart; *Au Tonkin*, a collection of Bonnetain’s dispatches as a war correspondent for *Le Figaro* in Tonkin during the spring of 1884, will be considered at length to illustrate the ways in which his belief in the concepts of polygenesis and racial degeneration would frame his depictions of the Vietnamese. The third chapter will focus chiefly on *L’Opium*, and its importance as

---

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Yee, *Clichés de la femme exotique: Un regard sur la littérature coloniale française entre 1871 et 1914* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000), 288.

the first Naturalist colonial novel. Bonnetain was the first of a series of Naturalist colonial authors who combined the hugely popular exoticism and racism associated with authors such as Pierre Loti, with the Naturalist penchant for scientific legitimacy. It will also be shown that in its treatment of hybridity or “métissage,” Bonnetain’s *L’Opium* established important literary precedents for the ways in which people of mixed race would be portrayed in Naturalist colonial novels. The conclusion will evaluate Bonnetain’s conception of the Vietnamese “race,” taking into account his general bent towards pessimism, and will suggest ways in which his writing could be further explored as a record of French racial ideologies in the early years of colonial expansion of the Third Republic.

### 1.1 The Life and Times of Paul Bonnetain

Paul Bonnetain had a life-long attachment to the colonies. His father, Jean Marc Bonnetain “returned home ignominiously” from Indochina in the 1850s to take up a low paying position in the postal service.<sup>3</sup> Paul was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1858 in Nîmes, though he would spend most of his childhood in the Vosges where his father was transferred while Paul was still very young. He would remain there until he was seventeen; years later, in 1883, he would recall that as a schoolboy in Saint-Dié, in the Vosges, he had received a *prix de narration française* presented by Jules Ferry.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Anthony A. Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain, his Life and Works,” (D. Phil. diss., University of Nottingham, 1965), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 2.



In August of 1876, only days after he turned eighteen, Bonnetain began a five-year term in the army as a member of the Fourth Regiment of the Marine Infantry. He both began and ended his service at Toulon, though in the intervening years most of his time was spent in French Guyana. He left the army in 1881 with the rank of *sous-officier*. By this time, his parents' already volatile marriage had ended. His father continued to entertain mistresses he could not afford, while his mother, "unable to support this rejection of her," had a nervous breakdown that led to her being committed to an asylum. Armed with only a few stories and sketches he had written in the army, Paul Bonnetain set out to earn a living as a writer in Paris.<sup>5</sup>

He was persistent and successful, in a short time finding his way into the offices of *Le Petit Parisien*, where he worked as a cashier for the burgeoning radical republican paper which serialized the novels and articles of Zola, Maupassant, Alphonse Daudet, and others in *La Vie Populaire*, its weekly literary review.<sup>6</sup> While writing for a variety of left-wing political publications to support himself in Paris, he produced his first book, *Le Tour du monde d'un troupier*,<sup>7</sup> a collection of stories based on his time spent in the colonies as a marine. He wrote letters to both Zola and Maupassant after the publication of the book, calling himself a "disciple" in both instances. At this early stage, he was much more concerned with winning the favor of his "seniors" than he was with literary style or technique.<sup>8</sup>

The stories in *Le Tour du monde d'un troupier* reveal Bonnetain's descriptive style, but it was not until his mother was hospitalized after a nervous breakdown that

---

<sup>5</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Bonnetain, *Le tour du monde d'un troupier* (Paris: Dreyfous, 1882).

<sup>8</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 66.

Bonnetain developed a general interest in literary theory and Naturalism as prescribed by Émile Zola in particular. He would write much of his first and most famous novel, *Charlot s'amuse* (1883), at her bedside in a sanatorium where she would ultimately commit suicide in 1884.<sup>9</sup>

Bonnetain's overtly Naturalist novel followed the effects of hereditary "degeneration" on a young soldier's life. Charlot, the 'onanist,' had been introduced to "degenerate" sexuality by a priest, and is the son of a prostitute and an alcoholic father. Charlot and his mother were both sexually molested by priests, linking anti-clerical sentiments to degeneration in typical Naturalist fashion.<sup>10</sup> He goes from one "degenerate" sexual practice to another, never neglecting to masturbate, and engaging in various acts with both sexes, until he falls so low as to engage in cross-dressing and rape, which are presumably equally "degenerate." At one defining point late in the novel, Charlot attends a lecture by the famous neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893). During the lecture, Charlot recognizes one of Charcot's hysterical female patients as his mother.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately he is consumed by his degenerate heredity, resorting to more and more degenerative practices until he commits suicide, leaving behind a child that will inherit all of his and its mother's degenerate characteristics.

After the publication of *Charlot s'amuse*, a lawsuit was brought against Bonnetain for immorality. Familiar with the popular science and scientism used by the Naturalists to explain and excuse their 'scandalous' subject matter, Bonnetain gained acquittal by claiming his book had scientific merit, though he would harbor a grudge against Zola

---

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bonnetain, *Charlot s'amuse* (Brussels: Kistemaeckers, 1883).

<sup>10</sup> "Civilization will not attain to its perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest." – Zola

<sup>11</sup> Bonnetain, *Charlot s'amuse*, 292-293.

who had not sent him the letter he had requested his “Master” write in order to be read at his trial. This animosity would boil over in the “Manifeste des Cinq.”<sup>12</sup>

Bonnetain’s publications after *Charlot s’amuse* were all concerned, in one way or another, with the colonies. He continued to write for *Le Figaro* during a second voyage to Tonkin in 1885. In 1886, he published *L’Opium*, a novel set in Tonkin.<sup>13</sup> He began to receive postings as a colonial official in 1890, spending long periods in various African locations before being posted to Laos.<sup>14</sup> He died in Kongh, Laos in 1899, leaving a widow and two adopted children. His death was widely believed to be a suicide.

In order to evaluate Bonnetain’s work thoroughly, it must be understood that he was, by all accounts, the victim of an extremely difficult temperament that is often conveyed, both intentionally and unintentionally, through his writing. Nguyen Van Phong includes Bonnetain in a group of writers made up of press and military men who “professait un dédain assez caractéristique pour la société indigène aussi bien que pour sa civilisation [professed a fairly typical contempt for the indigenous society as well as for

---

<sup>12</sup> David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24-26. The “Manifeste des Cinq” was a letter published on the front page of *Le Figaro*, on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1887, in which the five signatories derided Zola for *La Terre* which, along with the rest of the *Rougon-Macquart* series of novels, offended their “supreme respect for Art.” Their chief criticisms were that Zola had used vulgarity and sensationalism to sell his books, thus subordinating artistic validity to commercial success. The five referred to are Paul Bonnetain, J.-H. Rosny, Lucien Descaves, Paul Margueritte, Gustave Guiches. Of the five signatories, only Bonnetain had ever met Zola. It has been speculated that Bonnetain, who conceived of the letter while imbibing alcohol and opium with Rosny and Descaves (244), was probably inspired by the “caustic private criticisms of Zola” uttered by Edmond de Goncourt and Alphonse Daudet; however, both Goncourt and Daudet were more humiliated than amused by being implicated in the production of the letter.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Bonnetain, *L’Opium* (Paris: Charpentier, 1886).

<sup>14</sup> Other books by Bonnetain include: *Une femme à bord* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1883); *En mer* (Paris: J. Lévy, 1887); *Le Nommé Perreux* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1888); *Amours nomades* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1888); *Passagère* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1892); *L’Impasse* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1898).

his own civilization].”<sup>15</sup> However, he also had the following gracious but pointed words to say about Bonnetain’s writing specifically:

Les jugements d’un Bonnetain sur le Tonkin comme sur les habitants sont exagérément sévères et injustes, mais n’oublions pas que Bonnetain devait suivre pas à pas les troupes d’occupation dans leur périlleuse expédition du Tonkin, en qualité de journaliste correspondant du *Figaro*, et d’autre part que les préjugés raciaux prennent origine, comme les récentes études l’ont montré, dans l’état d’insécurité où se trouve engagé l’individu.  
[The judgments of a Bonnetain regarding Tonkin as well as its inhabitants are exaggeratedly severe and unfair, but let us not forget that Bonnetain had to follow step by step the occupying troops in their perilous Tonkin expedition, as the journalist correspondent from *Figaro*, and moreover that racial prejudices originate, as recent studies have shown, in the state of insecurity in which the individual finds himself involved.]<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely this “exaggeratedly severe and unfair” bias in Bonnetain’s writing that makes it such a valuable record of the limitations which popularly accepted French science put on the Vietnamese as one of the target populations in the *mission civilisatrice*. Thus, as much as the “state of insecurity” in which Bonnetain found himself may explain the exhibition of his prejudices, the prejudices themselves were part of a much more highly respected and much more widely disseminated discourse than his own.

## 1.2 Bonnetain in Recent Scholarship

The name of Paul Bonnetain is one that appears quite infrequently in recent scholarship. He generally is mentioned only cursorily in books and articles about French colonial literature,<sup>17</sup> being passed by on the way to Pierre Loti and other suitably

---

<sup>15</sup> Nguyen Van Phong, *La Société Vietnamiennne de 1882 à 1902 d’après les écrits des auteurs français* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 289.

<sup>16</sup> Nguyen Van Phong, *La Société Vietnamiennne*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> The exception to this rule is, Nguyen Van Phong, *La Société Vietnamiennne*.

predominant voices in the colonial fiction of the Third Republic.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes he is given the attention due a literary curio in book length discussions of Naturalism due to his first novel *Charlot s'amuse*, and his public break with Zola (and Naturalism) as recorded in the "Manifeste des Cinq."

Bonnetain has recently been cited as an important example of French attitudes regarding colonial peoples in Asia and Africa. In her book *Clichés de la femme exotique: Un regard sur la littérature coloniale française entre 1871 et 1914*, Jennifer Yee has used Bonnetain's work along with the work of other authors whom she has classed as colonial as opposed to exoticist writers. The key to this distinction according to Yee's work, is that colonial literature attempted to inform its readers about life in the colonies in its social and political aspects, while exoticist literature was written at a distance from the realities of colonial life, with the aim of providing a fantastic escape from life's pressures. Yee has pointed out that colonial novelists often claimed to be adapting the Naturalist credo associated with Émile Zola, using scientific determinism to interpret and explain the actions of their subjects; the most prominent aspect of this scientific determinism was the use of current racist theories. Although many exoticists like Pierre Loti were virulent racists, it was a new generation of Naturalist colonial writers who would stress the importance of racist theories, and devote considerable attention to explaining them.<sup>19</sup> Yee has rightly listed Bonnetain as one of these Naturalist colonial authors, citing

---

<sup>18</sup> Loti, who is treated more closely in the fourth chapter of this thesis, was unquestionably the most popular and influential writer of French colonial fiction in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

<sup>19</sup> Yee, *Clichés de la femme exotique*, 15-22.

a few passages from *Au Tonkin* and *L'Extrême Orient*, a book published in 1887.<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, however, Yee does not cite any passages from *L'Opium* in her work, though it is listed in the bibliography of *Clichés de la femme exotique*.<sup>21</sup> She does not note *L'Opium*'s importance as the first Naturalist colonial novel, though, as this thesis will show, the novel was to establish or define a number of trends that are recognized by Yee in later French depictions of Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Frank Proschan has made use of *L'Opium* as an example of "French Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese Genders," though his mistranslation of one key passage misconstrued its meaning in important ways, and he makes no mention of Bonnetain's importance as a Naturalist.<sup>22</sup> In her book *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*, Nicola Cooper lists both *Au Tonkin* and *L'Opium* as important examples of early French commentary on Indochina, though again Bonnetain and his works are not closely considered.<sup>23</sup> In fact, no one has done a proper study of Bonnetain's body of work since Anthony A. Greaves' 1965 doctoral thesis,

---

<sup>20</sup> Paul Bonnetain, *Le monde pittoresque et monumental: L'Extrême Orient* (Paris: Quantin, 1887). The parts of this book which deal with Vietnam and the Vietnamese are largely taken from *Au Tonkin* and the handful of articles which Bonnetain wrote for *Le Figaro* as their Tonkin correspondent in 1885, all of which I have consulted.

<sup>21</sup> Yee 2000, 350. See also, Jennifer Yee, "'L'Indochine androgyne': androgyny in turn-of-the-century French writing on Indochina" *Textual Practice* 15, no. 2 (2001), 269-282; Jennifer Yee, "*Métissage* in France: a postmodern fantasy and its forgotten precedents" *Modern & Contemporary France* 11, no. 4 (2003), pp. 411-425.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Proschan, "EUNUCH MANDARINS, SOLDATS MAMZELLES, EFFEMINATE BOYS, AND GRACELESS WOMEN: French Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese Genders," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 8, no. 4 (2002): 435-467.

<sup>23</sup> Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 26, 223.

which, despite its merits, gives almost no mention of Bonnetain's ideas regarding race, even though, as we shall see, Bonnetain elaborated upon these at length.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain." There was a doctoral thesis defended at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle 3 in 2008, with Bonnetain as its main focus (Frédéric Da Silva, "Aux confins du naturalisme : Paul Bonnetain (1858-1899)"), but it has not yet been made available.

## 2. CONTEXTS

This chapter will discuss Paul Bonnetain's pro-colonial stance as expressed in *Au Tonkin*. It will explore the ways in which his thinking represented an attempt to reconcile the republican mission to civilize, with the concept of polygenesis; during the second half of the nineteenth century, this belief in multiple origins of the human species was tantamount to seeing the human "races" as distinct species. While most contemporary pro-colonial French commentators believed in polygenesis, the contradiction in trying to civilize a race that was inherently inferior was not one with which they troubled themselves. It was left to the French men and women in the colonies to interpret the meaning of the *mission civilisatrice* on the ground. For Bonnetain in Tonkin, "métissage," which is best translated as "hybridity" or "racial mixing,"<sup>25</sup> was the obvious answer:

Nous sommes plus colonisateurs que les Anglais, puisque, sans sot orgueil, nous nous allions volontiers aux races inférieures, et puisque nos métis à nous, sous tous les climats, sont beaux, féconds et vigoureux; nous sommes plus colonisateurs que les Anglais, puis - qu'aucune loi de struggle for life ne nous fait nulle part exterminer l'indigène, détruire les races autochtones ; mais nous manquons de colons. Or, l'Afrique en exige. Immense, elle nous coûtera plus qu'elle ne nous rapportera, tant que nous ne l'aurons pas peuplée. La colonie sans colons, voilà donc pour nous la colonie idéale. [We are more inclined to be colonizers than the English, because, without foolish arrogance, we go voluntarily to the inferior races, and because our own métis, in all climates, are handsome, fertile and vigorous; we are more inclined to be colonizers than the English, because no struggle for life makes us destroy the indigenous populations anywhere, destroying native races; but we lack colonizers. Yet Africa requires them. Huge as it is, she will cost us more than she will bring us, as long as we don't populate her. The colony without colonizers, that is therefore the ideal colony for us.]<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Yee, "Métissage in France," 413.

<sup>26</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 201.



Thus métissage was a solution that would address both the inferiority of other races, and the general lack of French enthusiasm for the colonies. As Bonnetain made clear, the main reasons for French colonial expansion in Tonkin were centered on securing the greatness of France and ensuring its ability to compete with other European colonial and military powers, especially the British; the effort to civilize colonial populations was entirely secondary. Yet, what separated the French approach to colonialism from that of the British for Bonnetain, was the French willingness to attempt to regenerate the inferior races, as opposed to the brutal Darwinian outlook that Bonnetain ascribes to the British. In this chapter, it will be shown that Bonnetain's attitudes towards colonialism as expressed in *Au Tonkin*, represent a complex amalgamation of popular racialism and republican ideology. The words of republican politicians like Jules Ferry and Georges Clémenceau, as well as those of leading republican colonial theorists like Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, would be instrumental in formulating Bonnetain's pro-colonial position. However, while such men would have the luxury of making pronouncements about civilizing missions and inferior races without ever leaving the borders of France, Bonnetain would be left the task of making these fundamentally contradictory beliefs work together in the "contact zone"<sup>27</sup> – to find a way of civilizing the supposedly uncivilizable, of combining a hierarchy of races with the universalism of republican ideology.

## 2.1 Polygenesis

---

<sup>27</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

At the end of the sixth chapter of *L'Espèce humaine* [*The Human Species*] (1877), Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau summed up his thoughts regarding the crossing of animal breeds and the application it had in the consideration of racial mixing among human beings: “Ainsi sans sortir des considérations morphologiques qui répondent à la notion de ressemblance contenue dans la définition de l’espèce nous serions en droit de conclure en faveur du monogénisme [Thus without leaving morphological considerations which speak to the notion of resemblance contained in the definition of the species we would be right in concluding in favor of monogenism].”<sup>28</sup> Monogenism was the key factor in Quatrefages’ argument, for he believed, as the title of his book indicates, that human beings were all of one species.

This belief pitted him against most of the prominent French commentators of his own time. In the early 1880s, polygenism was a position held by great literary men such as Ernest Renan and Hippolyte Taine, to say nothing of the Comte de Gobineau or Gustave Le Bon.<sup>29</sup> Quatrefages and his theories were easily dismissed, not because of scientific evidence (as his book goes to great lengths to show), but rather because of his Catholicism.<sup>30</sup> During the early years of the “Opportunist era” in France (1879-1899), materialism and progress were the watchwords of republicans, and the Ferry Laws were seen as the victories of positivism in its “religious war” against Catholicism.<sup>31</sup> The taint

---

<sup>28</sup> A. de Quatrefages, *L'Espèce Humaine* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1877), 45.

<sup>29</sup> Ernest Renan, *La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France* (Paris : Michel Lévy Frères, 1872); H. A. Taine, *History of English Literature*, H. Van Laun trans. (Edinburgh : Edmonston and Douglas, 1873); Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, Adrian Collins trans. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915); Gustave Le Bon, *L’homme et les sociétés : Leurs origines et leur histoire* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1881).

<sup>30</sup> Yee, “*Métissage* in France,” 418.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present, Fifth Edition* (New York: Norton, 1995), 225-229.

of being an outspoken Catholic was enough to discredit Quatrefages out of hand as a scientific authority. Anti-clerical sentiments “meant that one of the major obstacles to polygenism was weakened.”<sup>32</sup> Naturally, the other, much more pervasive obstacle to the doctrine was the simple fact that children of mixed race existed, and they were not infertile. Yet, despite this obvious proof to the contrary, races would continue to be depicted as akin to species by French commentators of various stripes until well into the twentieth century, shifting by necessity from views which classed “métis” as completely or almost completely sterile, to elaborate modifications which spoke of various degrees of fertility.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of polygenesis in modern France is generally traced back to Voltaire (1694-1778) and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788). Voltaire made it quite clear that he thought Africans were a different species:

I am quite justified in believing that what is true of trees is true of men: that pears, firs, oaks, and apricots do not come from the same tree, and that bearded white men, woolly headed Negroes, Asiatics with their manes, and beardless men do not come from the same man.<sup>34</sup>

While Buffon would maintain, in theory, that human beings were all of one species (monogenism), he would also introduce a hierarchy of races based on degrees of “rationality and sociability.”<sup>35</sup> In so doing, Buffon would establish a link between the color of a person’s skin and their degree of civilization. This correlation would be

---

<sup>32</sup> Yee, “*Métissage* in France,” 418.

<sup>33</sup> Yee, “*Métissage* in France,” 412, 416.

<sup>34</sup> François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *Traité de la métaphysique* (1734), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 22 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1885), 192-193, cited in Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 101.

<sup>35</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 99.

combined with the polygenism endorsed by Voltaire. Other Encyclopedists established hierarchies based on culture, but Buffon “explicitly declares that skin color and way of life, thus levels of civilization, are related.”<sup>36</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, the debate between polygenism and monogenism was by no means decided.<sup>37</sup> Often it centered, naturally enough, around the viability of métis. Do they exhibit the best aspects of both races, or are they the first step towards racial decadence and sterility?

Monogenists used the fertility of supposedly hybrid types as proof of the unity of the human species, while polygenists questioned the continued viability of these hybrids, using some of Buffon’s ideas about interspecies fertility to bolster their claims. Buffon “demonstrated the fragility of the criterion of species,” citing examples like the inter-fertility of wolves and dogs, sheep and goats, and various birds. Although Buffon felt compelled to acknowledge the unity of the human species, he also felt compelled to assert that interspecies breeding did not result in sterility in numerous examples from the animal kingdom. Polygenists subsequently adopted this assertion, as a way to discount one of the chief arguments of monogenists.<sup>38</sup>

The questions in this debate were, of course, intimately connected with the intertwining histories of colonialism and slavery, and were inherently composed of “political, judicial, and literary” arguments.<sup>39</sup> The extreme polygenic stance, which held that mixing races would produce sterile (or nearly sterile) offspring, was first published in

---

<sup>36</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 101-102.

<sup>37</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 101.

<sup>38</sup> Claude Blanckaert, “Of Monstrous Métis? Hybridity, Fear of Miscegenation, and Patriotism from Buffon to Paul Broca,” in Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, ed., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 43-45.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

1850. The author was Robert Knox, a Scottish anatomist, who was, in fact, very much opposed to slavery. Not surprisingly, however, his theories, which depicted “mulattoes” as “unstable” monstrosities, were enthusiastically adopted and elaborated upon by the pro-slavery Anthropological Society of London, who spoke out in favor of the Confederacy during the American Civil War.<sup>40</sup> The pro-slavery voices of the American South also heartily endorsed these theories, though their dependence on theories originating in the United Kingdom was soon overtaken by their enthusiasm for a French theorist.

The Comte de Gobineau’s (1816-1882) theories of race paid lip service to the doctrine of monogenesis supported by the Church. Gobineau, who was a member of a Bourbonist family and a lifelong royalist, could hardly dismiss out of hand the Biblical creation story which gave mankind a single origin.<sup>41</sup> However, in practice he would adopt polygenism, rather ingeniously keeping it within the confines of religious orthodoxy.<sup>42</sup> Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853-1855) was for his contemporaries a “synthesis of previous strands of Western chauvinist thought,”<sup>43</sup> and it represented a hardening of the scientific debate surrounding polygenism along nationalist lines.<sup>44</sup> The *Essai*, a four-volume thesis, which purported to explain the fates of civilizations as determined by their racial composition, was considered by Gobineau to be

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 50-51; Ronald Rainger, “Race, Politics, and Science: The Anthropological Society of London in the 1860s,” *Victorian Studies* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1978), 62 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Deborah Dwork, Robert Jan Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: Norton & Company, 2003), 20.

<sup>42</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 130.

<sup>43</sup> Gregory Blue, “Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the “Yellow Peril,” and the Critique of Modernity,” *Journal of World History* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1999), 98.

<sup>44</sup> Blanckaert, “Monstrous Métis,” 43.

his best work.<sup>45</sup> In it, he distinguished his distinct brand of monogenism from those of the “unitarians” who spoke of the equality of the races. For Gobineau, the races were fixed into three “permanent types” – white, yellow and black – as the result of a “cosmic cataclysm” which happened shortly after the Creation.<sup>46</sup> The black and yellow races are primordial deviations caused by climate which are “very slightly, if at all” related to the pure “Adamite stock” of the white races.<sup>47</sup> As to the proof of “the fertility of human hybrids,” he admitted that “Up to now, this has been very difficult to refute, but perhaps it will not always be so.”<sup>48</sup>

Gobineau’s theories provided a popular causal relationship between the widely disseminated belief in the *cultural* superiority of the West and the *biological* superiority of the white race.<sup>49</sup> For Gobineau, the “blood in its veins” is what makes a race great.<sup>50</sup> This is strongly reflected in Bonnetain’s idea of the “ideal colony,” where he seems to suggest that, because the progeny of mixed French and Vietnamese ancestry would have the civilizing effect of French “blood,” they would somehow be genetically inclined to support the French colonial project, despite being specifically described as not being colonists – “La colonie sans colons.” They would become less a part of Vietnam, though they would be native to Vietnam, thereby effectively making the Vietnamese more French without the need for any cultural exchange beyond the one implied in Gobineau’s views of miscegenation.

---

<sup>45</sup> Blue, “Gobineau on China,” 96-98.

<sup>46</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> Gobineau, *Inequality*, 118, 139.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>49</sup> Blue, “Gobineau on China,” 98.

<sup>50</sup> Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, in Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, ed., *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), 45.

However, Bonnetain's thoughts on race are distinct from Gobineau's in several crucial ways. Gobineau was opposed to miscegenation among the three racial "permanent types," which does not square with Bonnetain's enthusiasm for *métissage*. Furthermore, Gobineau spent twenty years as a diplomat in the service of Napoleon III, and he was both "antirevolutionary and anti-Enlightenment."<sup>51</sup> By 1884, Bonnetain, and indeed the vast majority of republicans, had embraced anti-clericalism, which they saw as stemming directly from the Enlightenment, and the ideals of the First Republic. His enthusiasm for *métissage* was, as we shall see, a reflection of his republican, anti-clerical sympathies.

*The Origin of the Species*, Charles Darwin's masterpiece which has often been cited as the century's most important book, was published in 1859, only a few years after Gobineau's masterwork.<sup>52</sup> In later editions of his *Essai*, Gobineau would attach an introduction intended as an apology for the thesis of his book, a portion of which was devoted to discussing the impact of Darwinism in the intervening years:

Une des idées maîtresses de cet ouvrage, c'est la grande influence des mélanges ethniques, autrement dit des mariages entre les races diverses. [...] De là fut tirée la théorie de la sélection devenue si célèbre entre les mains de Darwin et plus encore de ses élèves. [One of the governing ideas of this work, is the great influence of ethnic mixing, in other words marriages between the diverse races. [...] From there was drawn the theory of selection which has become so famous in the hands of Darwin and even more so his students.]<sup>53</sup>

While most French republican readers of 1884 would have balked at the suggestion that Gobineau's ideas had spawned those of Darwin, there are definite similarities between Gobineau's ideas about racial mixing producing "hybrids," and

---

<sup>51</sup> Blue, "Gobineau on China," 96-98.

<sup>52</sup> Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 103.

<sup>53</sup> Le Comte de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, Deuxième Édition, Tome Premier* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884), xv.

Darwin's statement that "fertility and sterility are not safe criterions of specific distinctness."<sup>54</sup> In any case, Gobineau may have been overstating his own importance, but his attitude towards Darwin would share one important similarity with widely held French opinions about Darwin during the late nineteenth century: Darwin had taken most of his ideas from the French. Most French biologists promoting the "republican cult of science" saw Darwin's theories as merely an extension of the ideas of Lamarck, and this despite the fact that Lamarckian theory maintained a belief in the "inheritance of acquired characteristics,"<sup>55</sup> in direct opposition to Darwin's theory of natural selection. For Bonnetain, as for a variety of other French commentators, the brutality of the Darwinian struggle for life, in which "an endless number of lower races will be eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world,"<sup>56</sup> was not acceptable precisely because it gave primacy to the brutal frankness of nature. However, the defining difference between the Darwinian explanation of human origins, and those of Lamarck, Gobineau, or any of the other French adherents to the theories of either mono- or polygenesis, was that Darwin had escaped the confines of a Biblical creation.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Darwin wrote specifically against any idea of fixed races:

But the most weighty of all the arguments against treating the races of man as distinct species, is that they graduate into each other, independently in many cases, as far as we can judge, of their having intercrossed. Man has been studied more carefully than any other organic being, and yet there is the greatest possible

---

<sup>54</sup> Charles Darwin, "On the Races of Man," from *The Descent of Man*, in Robert Bernasconi, *The Idea of Race*, 54.

<sup>55</sup> Linda L. Clark, "Social Darwinism in France," *The Journal of Modern History* 53 no. 1 On Demand Supplement (March, 1981), D1029.

<sup>56</sup> From an 1881 letter written by Darwin to W. Graham, in Francis Darwin, ed., *Charles Darwin: His Life Told In An Autobiographical Chapter, And In A Selected Series Of His Published Letters* (London: John Murray, 1908), 64.

<sup>57</sup> Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 94. It is for this reason that, "Darwin's theory did not address itself directly to the polygenist or monogenist argument."



diversity among capable judges whether he should be classed as a single species or race, or as two (Virey), as three (Jacquinot) ...or as sixty-three according to Burke. This diversity of judgment does not prove that the races ought not to be ranked as species, but it shows that they graduate into each other, and that it is hardly possible to discover clear distinctive characters between them.<sup>58</sup>

Bonnetain saw his own generation as being particularly well-equipped to do away with the religious orthodoxy that provided the buttressing for Gobineau's thoughts on race: "l'éducation positive de notre génération a tué dans l'œuf les enthousiasmes irréflechis qu'une hérédité trop tenace aurait pu nous léguer [the positive education of our generation has nipped in the bud the unchecked enthusiasms that a too tenacious heredity could have bequeathed us]."<sup>59</sup> This new generation understood the necessity of colonial expansion "politiquement ou mieux scientifiquement parlant [politically or better yet scientifically speaking]."<sup>60</sup> The irony of these claims to a cold, rational objectivity, in light of the Biblical foundations of the debate between polygenism and monogenism, was lost on Bonnetain and he was not alone. Even in Britain, voices as influential as that of James Hunt, president of the Anthropological Society of London, would attempt to claim, in 1866, that Darwin's ideas on race clearly supported the idea of polygenesis.<sup>61</sup> And this claim appears to have some validity, especially in French circles.

Although Bonnetain frequently expressed his strict adherence to materialism and a scientific outlook, he also made clear that he himself was "ni un savant, ni un géographe [neither a scholar, nor a geographer]."<sup>62</sup> As such, he did not make any direct references to any of the racial theorists popular in his own time. However, he did refer to

---

<sup>58</sup> Charles Darwin, "On the Races of Man," from *The Descent of Man*, in Robert Bernasconi, *The Idea of Race*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 195.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>61</sup> Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 93.

<sup>62</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 208.

Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), and his archaeological “génie synthétique [synthesizing genius],” saying that such a genius would be necessary to understand the history of Vietnamese in Tonkin, who provided little in the way of monuments, memories, or written records of their past.<sup>63</sup> Cuvier was commonly known for his assertion that all known life forms were present at creation, and that only extinction accounted for the disappearance of some species, and the ensuing predominance of others. He believed that species were “fixed in form for all time,” a belief which was in direct contradiction to the *transformisme* of his senior contemporary Lamarck.<sup>64</sup> His ideas on race were both contradictory (“While he believed in the intellectual and physical superiority of Europeans and came to consider cultural differences to be a product of race, he was not a polygenist”), and a reflection of his ardent Catholicism, echoing those of Buffon and anticipating those of Gobineau.<sup>65</sup> As a result, his assertion that races had “immutable cranial differences,”<sup>66</sup> was widely used by posterity, in concert with his belief in the fixity of species, to support “polygenic tendencies in race science.”<sup>67</sup> In *Au Tonkin*, Bonnetain leaves little doubt that, in referring to Cuvier, he also intended to evoke the lauded naturalist’s belief in the immutable fixity of species to promote a polygenic view of race. Twice Bonnetain refers to the “Annamite race” as a “species,” a belief that was typical of the republican and anti-clerical scientism that commonly endorsed polygenism.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>64</sup> Milfred Wolpoff, Rachel Caspari, *Race and Human Evolution: A Fatal Attraction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 73.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 100.

<sup>68</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 164, 209. “Quand la variole et la syphilis l’ont permis, l’enfant est gracieux, presque joli, gentil toujours, et drôle comme un petit singe dont il a

The magnanimous and popular Léon Gambetta had proclaimed in 1870 that the republic would be scientific if it was to exist at all, and it was a mainstay of republican anti-clerical lore in the early Third Republic that a lack of scientific principles imparted in the clerical schools of the empire had led to the defeat of 1870.<sup>69</sup> Polygenism was virtually a constant component of this scientistic conception of nationalism, although it was not generally given a particularly close reading. Most French writings concerned with racial questions, and racial degeneration in particular, were focused on France and Europe. This will be discussed in the second chapter.

Tzvetan Todorov has identified Taine, Renan, and Gobineau as the “most zealous proponents” of racialism in the second half of the nineteenth century, and all three were polygenists;<sup>70</sup> Taine and Renan could also be said to be two of the most influential thinkers of the period, and Renan and Gobineau would exchange letters in which they discussed Gobineau’s *Essai*, among other things. However, although the three men were contemporaries, Taine and Renan were both champions of aspects of the Enlightenment,

---

l'intelligence grimacière et la précocité. Cette précocité demeure même la caractéristique de l'espèce [When smallpox and syphilis have permitted it, the child is gracious, almost pretty, always kind, and funny like a little monkey of which he has the affected intelligence and the precociousness. This precocity could even be said to be the characteristic of the species].” (164) “Aussi, familier des servitudes, se courbe-t-il déjà sous notre domination, et se multiplie-t-il à notre ombre, tout heureux de ce que le hasard, lui donnant des blancs d'Europe pour nouveaux maîtres, lui ait amené ces Français, pitoyables aux longues infortunes et prodiges de leur force, qui ne dédaignent pas, sous aucun soleil, de régénérer les espèces par des alliances souvent passagères, productives toujours [Also, familiar with constraints on his liberty, he is already submitting to our domination, and is multiplying in our shadow, well pleased with his fate, which has given him white Europeans as his new masters, has brought him these French, sensitive to long-lived misfortunes and prodigious in their strength, who do not disdain, under any sun, to regenerate species through unions which are often in passing, always productive].” (209)

<sup>69</sup> Linda L. Clark, “Social Darwinism in France,” *The Journal of Modern History* 53 no. 1 On Demand Supplement (March, 1981), D1029.

<sup>70</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 114.

and both men were republicans.<sup>71</sup>

While it is uncertain how familiar Bonnetain was with the works of any of these three writers, he had, as he assured the reader of *Au Tonkin*, gone to considerable lengths in researching his concept of the ideal colony.<sup>72</sup> For a stance that could be said to promote métissage in the manner of Bonnetain's, perhaps Renan's position on the matter comes closest. In *La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France* (1871), written immediately after the loss of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, Renan had denounced the idea of warfare among "equal races" while championing colonial wars: "Autant les conquêtes entre races égales doivent être blâmées, autant la régénération des races inférieures ou abâtardies par les races supérieures est dans l'ordre providentiel de l'humanité [Just as conquests between equal races are to be blamed, so the regeneration of inferior or bastardized races by the superior races is in the providential order of humanity]."<sup>73</sup>

In a letter to Gobineau from 1856, Renan had enthusiastically endorsed Gobineau's *Essai*, but had qualified his enthusiasm specifically with regards to Gobineau's stance taken against miscegenation. Gobineau felt that the white races were doomed to degenerate, and that only avoiding racial mixing among them could help to forestall this inevitable decline. Renan, on the other hand, felt that mixing among the superior races would ultimately produce a homogenous result: "En mettant à part les races tout à fait inférieures dont l'immixtion aux grandes races ne ferait qu'empoisonner

---

<sup>71</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 114-119. "Taine holds onto materialism and discards humanism." (117) Renan felt that "Without science, humanity would not deserve our respect." (118)

<sup>72</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 190-191

<sup>73</sup> Renan, *La réforme*, 93.

l'espèce humaine, je conçois pour l'avenir une humanité homogène [Setting apart those utterly inferior races the mixing of which with the great races would only poison the human species, for the future I conceive of a homogenous humanity].”<sup>74</sup> Clearly, the meaning of this statement hinges on the meaning of “utterly inferior races.”

Bonnetain would make clear his opinion that, although the Vietnamese were not “natives of pure blood,” nor were they degenerate enough to be classed as “absolutely inferior.”<sup>75</sup> However, for Renan the noblest countries – Italy, France, Britain – were of mixed “race” wherein races referred to subdivisions within the category of “white” in the three color scheme which he had adopted from Gobineau. It was the work of the “anthropologistes physiologistes” to understand race in the context of “zoologie.” Those divisions were much further removed than the philological sense of the term that Renan used in reference to Western Europe.<sup>76</sup> Thus for Renan, it would seem, all of the yellow and black races are the “utterly inferior races.” For Bonnetain this was clearly not the case, and the reasons behind his enthusiasm for métissage are to be found not in academic dialogue and debate, but rather in the political debate surrounding colonial expansion during the period 1878-1885.

## 2.2 Civilizing the Inherently Inferior

The following pages will explore the ways in which Jules Ferry and others constructed the republican idea of empire, and will show how they were able to use the

---

<sup>74</sup> Jules Chaix-Ruy, *Ernest Renan* (Paris: E. Vitte, 1956), 240.

<sup>75</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 209.

<sup>76</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882*. (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1882), 15-16.

concept of polygenesis to avoid “the fundamental contradiction between democracy and the forcible acquisition of an empire.”<sup>77</sup> By charting the development of social Darwinism in the Third Republic, it will be shown that Ferry used the concept of polygenesis as a way to make the universalism of republican ideology – liberty, equality, fraternity – work in relative terms of inferiority and superiority. Inferior races would be subjected to pacification and the civilizing influence of the superior French race, with the aim of making superior races out of inferior races.

The idea of civilizing a race “marked for slavery,” presented a problem to Bonnetain:<sup>78</sup> how to civilize those which popular racialism described as inherently inferior. Bonnetain’s suggestion that miscegenation was the answer to this problem, was in fact an attempt to reconcile two conflicting strains of thought intertwined in the French civilizing mission: republican egalitarianism and polygenesis. The belief in inferior and superior races so famously endorsed by Jules Ferry, was coupled with the liberalism that he learned from John Stuart Mill (1806- 1873), among others.

Britain made many important strides in the building and pacification of its empire during the Second Empire in France, and Napoleon III also made several forays into colonial expansion, though his ventures, particularly in Mexico, were decidedly less fruitful than those of the British. British liberalism, and Mill in particular, strongly influenced many elites in France during the period. Well before he espoused the mercantilist doctrines which typified his pro-colonial rhetoric, Jules Ferry was something

---

<sup>77</sup> Conklin, 1997, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 236.

of a disciple of Mill's.<sup>79</sup> It was Gambetta who would finally win Ferry over to a policy of colonial expansion in 1878,<sup>80</sup> and it has been well established that it was, in fact, Gambetta who was the chief political architect of the Tunisian expedition of 1881.<sup>81</sup> When Gambetta endorsed action in Tunisia, Ferry "fell into line and adopted the forward policy as his own."<sup>82</sup> Upon learning of the Treaty of Bardo between France and Tunisia, Gambetta wrote to congratulate Ferry, saying that the acquisition of Tunisia had remade France a great power.<sup>83</sup> Thus Ferry's desire for a larger French empire grew primarily out of a desire for French greatness and republican solidarity; his liberal justification for colonial expansion would come largely from Mill.

Mill's words concerning the necessity of liberal state institutions were clearly not lost on Ferry's rallying cry concerning education, "laïque, gratuite, obligatoire [secular, free, obligatory]."<sup>84</sup> What is more important in understanding Ferry's pro-colonial position, is Ferry's use of Mill's work to explain his expansionist approach to a policy regarding Tunisia. In 1882, only a few months after the fall of his first ministry (25<sup>th</sup> September, 1880 – 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1881), Ferry anonymously contributed the preface to *Les Affaires de Tunisie* by Alfred Rambaud:

La concurrence est de plus en plus ardente entre nations européennes, pour se disputer ces débouchés lointains, ces stations aux portes de la barbarie, qu'un instinct sûr indique à la vieille Europe comme les têtes de pont de la civilisation et

---

<sup>79</sup> Thomas F. Power Jr., *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), 8.

<sup>80</sup> Jean Michael Gaillard, *Jules Ferry* (Fayard, 1989), 532.

<sup>81</sup> J.P.T. Bury, "Gambetta and Overseas Problems" *The English Historical Review* 82, no. 323 (1967), 277. Gambetta was himself convinced of the need for a policy of action in Tunisia by the Baron de Courcel during several interviews that the Baron requested in the early months of 1881. (287)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>84</sup> Gaillard, *Jules Ferry*, 9.

les voies de l'avenir. Les nécessités d'une production industrielle, incessamment croissante, et tenue de s'accroître, sous peine de mort; la recherche des marchés inexplorés; l'avantage (si bien défini par Stuart Mill) qu'il y a "pour les vieux et riches pays de porter dans les pays neufs des travailleurs ou des capitaux" ... les progrès manifestes de la sociabilité européenne et des idées pacifiques, tout pousse les nations civilisées à transporter sur le terrain plus large et plus fécond des entreprises lointaines leurs anciennes rivalités. [The competition grows more and more ardent between European nations, to dispute faraway prospects, those stations on the threshold of barbarism, which an instinct unmistakably identifies for old Europe as the bases of civilization and the routes of the future. The necessities of an industrial production that is incessantly growing, and that will continue to grow, at pain of death; the quest for unexplored markets; the advantage (so well defined by Stuart Mill) that exists "for rich old countries to export workers and capital to new countries" ... the areas of progress manifest in European sociability and pacific ideas, are all pushing civilized nations to carry their old rivalries onto the larger and more fertile field of faraway enterprises.<sup>85</sup>

As Ferry points out, Mill's argument was for the "exportation of laborers and capital from old to new countries, from a place where their productive power is less, to a place where it is greater," by which he meant places like "South Australia, Port Philip, and New Zealand," where a system of continued emigration from the mother country could benefit both the "new" country and the metropole.<sup>86</sup> The meaning of Mill's words hinges upon the meaning of the "newness" of a country, and although the existing populations in Australia and New Zealand presumably saw nothing new about their homelands (other than the arrival of colonists from France and Britain), they were relatively small in number and thus easily disregarded in the grand scheme of empire. However, Mill also "studied the British Empire, as a scholar and as an official of the East India Company, throughout his life."<sup>87</sup> Like Ferry, Mill was also attempting to justify

---

<sup>85</sup> Paul Robiquet, *Discours et opinions politiques de Jules Ferry* (Paris, A. Colin, 1893-98), 5:525, cited in Gaillard, *Jules Ferry*, 539.

<sup>86</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (Boston: Charles C. Little & James Brown, 1848), 2:550, 554.

<sup>87</sup> Eileen P. Sullivan, "Liberalism and Imperialism: J. S. Mill's Defence of the British Empire," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (1983), 599.



colonialism at a vital juncture both in the development of his nation's empire, and in the development of a colonial ideology in "a liberal tradition which was primarily anti-imperialist."<sup>88</sup> Given the tacit support his employment showed for the British control of India, the following passage from his essay "A Few Words on Non-Intervention" (1859) is hardly surprising:

In the first place, the rules of ordinary international morality imply reciprocity. But barbarians will not reciprocate. They cannot be depended on for observing any rules. *Their minds are not capable of so great an effort*, nor their will sufficiently under the influence of distant motives. [...] To characterize any conduct whatever towards a barbarous people as a violation of the law of nations, only shows that he who so speaks has never considered the subject. A violation of great principles of morality it may easily be; but *barbarians have no rights as a nation, except a right to such treatment as may, at the earliest possible period, fit them for becoming one*. The only moral laws for the relation between a civilized and a barbarous government, are the universal rules of morality between man and man.<sup>89</sup>

Mill goes on to say that two examples of this sort of situation, where intervention is not only permissible and necessary but also ethically laudable, are found in "the conduct of the French in Algeria, or of the English in India." A nation such as France or Britain, "After a longer or shorter interval of forbearance, will either find itself obliged to conquer them, or to assert so much authority over them, and so break their spirit." The ways in which his thinking might appeal to a reluctant convert to the pro-colonial faction like Ferry become clearer. The following excerpt from a parliamentary speech made on 28 March 1884 by Ferry concerning French involvement in Madagascar echoes much of what Mill has said about the "barbarous" peoples of Algeria and India:

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid 599.

<sup>89</sup> John Stuart Mill, "A Few Words On Non-Intervention," in *Dissertations and Discussions: Political Philosophical and Historical by John Stuart Mill* (New York: Henry Holt, 1882), 3:252-253. My italics.

Messieurs, j'estime que c'est un devoir des peuples civilisés de mettre dans leurs rapports avec les peuples barbares la plus grande longanimité. Il ne s'agit pas d'apporter des susceptibilités tirées du point d'honneur dans les rapports que l'on noue avec les Annamites, les Chinois ou les Malgaches : il faut se placer à un point de vue d'une race supérieure qui ne conquiert pas pour son plaisir, dans le but d'exploiter le plus faible, mais bien de le civiliser et de l'élever jusqu'à elle. [Gentlemen, I esteem that it is the duty of civilized peoples to put in their rapport with barbarous peoples the greatest forbearance. It will not do to bring with us susceptibilities stemming from a point of honor in the rapports that we build with the Annamites, the Chinese or the Malagasy: we must take the point of view of a superior race that conquers not for its pleasure, with the goal of exploiting the most weak, but rather to properly civilize him and to elevate him to itself.]<sup>90</sup>

The importance of Ferry's use of the term "race" should not be underestimated, particularly given his admiration for scientific precision; it changed his argument from Mill's in a way in which Mill would not have found acceptable. In Britain, the "struggle for life" emphasized by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and others as the "survival of the fittest," was widely influential in liberal thought as the concept of social Darwinism.<sup>91</sup> Mill's thought opposed social Darwinism, because he believed that "the conscious choice of individuals is the crucial part of utilitarianism." Spencer and a new generation of Utilitarian thinkers saw biological determinism as the primary force behind social change.<sup>92</sup> In his highly publicized debate with Thomas Carlyle during 1850, Mill had asserted that Africans were not inherently inferior, and that Egyptian civilization, the source of inspiration for the Greeks, had been an African civilization.<sup>93</sup> It was thus no accident that Mill suggested that, despite the inefficiencies of their "minds" (not "brains"), barbarous peoples could become a nation unto themselves. What Ferry did, however, was to introduce the strictly biological idea of race into the equation. He

---

<sup>90</sup> Robiquet, *Discours et Opinions*, 5:159.

<sup>91</sup> Clark, "Social Darwinism," D1031.

<sup>92</sup> R. J. Halliday, "Social Darwinism: A Definition," *Victorian Studies* 14 no. 4 (June 1971), 396.

<sup>93</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, 127-128.

married biological determinism based on inferior and superior races, with the incompatible idea that civilization is a universal human possibility. The belief in superior and inferior races precluded the idea that all races could be equally civilized. Ferry had brought the inherent inequality stressed in social Darwinist theories into the fold of republican ideals. A long positivist pedigree against both Lamarckian and Darwinian evolution had characterized the thought of both Comte and Émile Littré (1801-1881) his chosen successor, and had checked the advancement of social Darwinism in liberal intellectual circles.<sup>94</sup> It would be the work of Ferry and others to remove the intellectual obstruction that had prevented evolutionary ethics from entering the “official culture” of the Third Republic.<sup>95</sup>

The almost cultish reverence for reason and science that typified the liberal republican ideology during the early years of the Third Republic, was very much in evidence in the consideration of social questions such as those addressed by the Ferry Laws. In contrast to contemporary British and German commentators, however, French political and academic rhetoric did not often employ Darwinism to explore social questions.<sup>96</sup> Upon the publication of the *Origin of the Species* in 1859, most reputed French biologists were skeptical and were more concerned with the impact that such theorizing would have in terms of the metaphysical. Darwin’s theory was also in opposition to George Cuvier’s (1769-1832) theory of the “fixity of species” which still held sway in French circles, and was used to oppose the evolutionary theories of both

---

<sup>94</sup> Clark, “Social Darwinism,” D1031.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., D1026. “The term official culture is employed to describe not a single philosophy but rather a sharing of political and social views supportive of first the Second Empire and then the Third Republic.”

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., D1026.

Lamarck and Darwin. Significantly, the most prominent uses of Darwinian ideas in social theorizing were seen in the pamphlets and tracts of socialist and anarchist commentators; the replacement of “struggle for life” with “union for life” would spread from the far left to become the slogan endorsed by premier Léon Bourgeois in 1902.<sup>97</sup>

In spite of attacks from Littré (1801-1881) and other leading positivists, Darwinism did seep into the dominant political discourse, as did the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer. Alfred Fouillée and other prominent intellectuals began to seek “appropriate French uses for Darwin and Herbert Spencer.” While Fouillée would accept Darwin’s idea that nature selects dispassionately for utility, he felt that human psychology was a factor that Darwin had failed to account for:<sup>98</sup>

La sélection naturelle a pu par la suite, comme le pense Darwin, accroître cet instinct social et lui donner une fixité plus grande ; mais l’instinct lui-même n’est pas né à l’origine de l’utilité proprement dite : il est né du plaisir. Darwin a eu tort d’insister trop exclusivement sur les considérations utilitaires et pas assez sur les considérations psychologiques tirées du jeu des images ou des idées. [Natural selection would thus be able, according to Darwin, to overcome that social instinct and give it a greater fixity; but the instinct itself is not originally born of utility as such: it is born of pleasure. Darwin was wrong to insist too exclusively on utilitarian considerations and not enough on psychological considerations stemming from the interplay of images or ideas.]<sup>99</sup>

At the same time, during the first few years of the 1880s, Ferry’s reforms began to introduce Darwin and Spencer into the educational system, a prominent example being a best-selling textbook by Fouillée’s wife.<sup>100</sup> Fouillée would typify a new emphasis placed on Spencer’s work, which saw in it the promotion of the primacy of altruistic actions rather than an uncompassionate “struggle for life.” The “emerging republican

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., D1027, D1035

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., D1031.

<sup>99</sup> Alfred Fouillée, *La science sociale contemporaine* (Paris: Hachette, 1880), 102-103.

<sup>100</sup> Clark, “Social Darwinism,” D1031, D1031ff.

consensus on evolutionary ethics” would stress this primacy on altruism.<sup>101</sup> This

consensus was perhaps best described by Ferry himself on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1881:

Ce qui est profondément rassurant [...] c’est que toutes ces morales que vous appelez évolutionniste, utilitaire, positiviste, c’est la même morale. [...] Le livre de M. Spencer, qui a pour point de départ la satisfaction, l’intérêt, la morale du plaisir, comme on voudra, arrive, par une évolution logique qui est admirable, à des conclusions absolument identique à celles de la morale de Kant, identiques à celle de la morale de l’honorable M. Jules Simon. [What is profoundly reassuring [...] is that all these moralities which you have identified as evolutionary, utilitarian, positivist, are the same morality. Mr. Spencer’s book, which has as its starting point satisfaction, interest, the morality of pleasure, what have you, arrives, through a logical and admirable evolution, at conclusions which are absolutely identical to those of the morality of Kant, identical to those of the morality of the honorable M. Jules Simon.]<sup>102</sup>

The extent to which this softened take on social Darwinism was almost universally tied to a belief in French racial superiority, is perhaps best demonstrated by the attacks of Georges Clémenceau, Ferry’s bitterest opponent, on the ideology behind the French civilizing mission. He would use notions of French racial superiority to attack Ferry’s pronouncements regarding inferior and superior races. The following passage is from a parliamentary speech given by Clémenceau in the Chamber of Deputies on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1885, two days after Ferry’s famous superior and inferior races speech, and several months after the fall of Ferry’s second parliament at the end of March; although Clémenceau would famously criticize Ferry for claiming that given races were inferior, there is no doubt that he considered “la race française” to be a race imbued with inherent advantages, albeit advantages which should cause them to disavow the logic of the civilizing mission:

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., D1032.

<sup>102</sup> Robiquet, *Discours et opinions*, 4:178. The reference to Jules Simon indicates the morality of Christianity.

Races supérieures ! Races inférieures ! C'est bientôt dit ! Pour ma part, j'en rabats singulièrement depuis que j'ai vu des savants allemands démontrer scientifiquement que la France devait être vaincue dans la guerre franco-allemande, parce que le Français est d'une race inférieure à l'Allemand. Depuis ce temps, je l'avoue, j'y regarde à deux fois avant de me retourner vers un homme et vers une civilisation et de prononcer : homme ou civilisation inférieure ! [...] C'est le génie même de la race française que d'avoir généralisé la théorie du droit et de la justice, d'avoir compris que le problème de la civilisation était d'éliminer la violence des rapports des hommes entre eux, dans une même société, et de tendre à éliminer la violence, pour un avenir que nous ne connaissons pas, des rapports des nations entre elles. [Superior races! Inferior races! That's easily said! For my part, I've made a point of getting rid of that language since I saw German experts demonstrating scientifically that France was destined to be defeated in the Franco-German war because the Frenchman is from a race inferior to the German. Since that time, I swear, I think twice before I turn towards a man or a civilization and pronounce: inferior man or civilization! [...] It is likewise the genius of the French race to have generalized the theory of law and justice, to have understood that the problem of civilization was to eliminate violence from dealings between men, within a selfsame society, and to aim at eliminating violence, for a future which we do not know, from the dealings between nations.]<sup>103</sup>

In 1885, Clémenceau did not make clear exactly how France would be able to eliminate the violence between other nations, but he did feel that the French had a special obligation as a race to use their uniquely civilized qualities to civilize other nations. And, although he might have thought twice about it, Clémenceau quite clearly felt that the violence that the French nation had participated in was part of an agenda of “law and justice” which France was beholden to follow to eliminate violence “from the dealings between nations.” In his view, French history since the Revolution was “une vivante protestation contre [a lively protestation against]” the idea that force should triumph over what is right.<sup>104</sup> His take on the Darwinian struggle for life fit very well with the idea of a “union for life” coming from the far left:

---

<sup>103</sup> “Politique Coloniale: Discours prononcé par M. Clémenceau à la Chambre des Deputés le jeudi 30 juillet 1885” (Paris: Bureaux du journal *La Justice*, 1885), 22, 23.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Non, il n'y a pas de droit de nations dites supérieures contre les nations inférieures ; il y a la lutte pour la vie qui est une nécessité fatale, qu'a mesure que nous nous élevons dans la civilisation, nous devons contenir dans les limites de la justice et du droit. Mais n'essayons pas de la revêtir la violence du nom hypocrite de civilisation... (*Très bien ! très bien ! à l'extrême gauche.*) [No, so called superior nations do not have any right against inferior nations; there is the struggle for life that is a fatal necessity, which to the degree that we further educate ourselves about civilization, we should contain within the limits of what is right and just. But let us not attempt to dress up violence in the hypocritical name of civilization... (*Hear! hear! from the far left.*)]<sup>105</sup>

Despite his distaste for Ferry's blunt assertion that superior nations had a right "against" inferior nations, Clémenceau merely felt that this superiority should manifest itself rather as a mentality that would encourage superior nations to work "with" inferior nations. It is clear that the concept of race, and the superiority of the French race, were ideas which a variety of French commentators felt explained and justified trends and initiatives both within France, and between France and other nations. Ferry's famous speech about inferior and superior races was thus both a summing up of ideas and sentiments regarding social Darwinism in the early decades of the Third Republic, and a challenge sent to the members of the superior French race to civilize the inferior races. However, the concept of race was in itself an idea that garnered considerable intellectual attention, and it was not Ferry's job to explain the details of how or why the French would be able to civilize other races, nor how this was in fact being undertaken. This job would fall to the writers who experienced the pacification and civilizing of colonial

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 24-25. Clémenceau's ardent stance against colonialism during the 1880s had "degenerated into indifference" by the time he became premier for the second time in 1917 (C. M. Andrew, A. S. Forstner, "The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914-1918," *The Historical Journal* 17, no. 1 (1974), 96). In the closing months of the war, he did not hesitate to take "full advantage" of the availability of colonial troops (Spencer Tucker, *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 262-263).

populations first hand, among whom Bonnetain would pioneer the Naturalist penchant for a “positive” perspective in the colonial context.

Paul Bonnetain began his career as a writer in Paris in the offices of *La Bataille*, a newspaper with Radical sympathies. Several times in his articles written for the paper over the course of 1882, Bonnetain hinted at the possibility of the lower classes rising in another revolution; at one point he even suggested the possibility of the reappearance of the Commune in a long-term capacity. While his approach to social problems would be refined considerably over the course of the coming months and years, it can safely be said that, even into the 1890s Bonnetain remained largely a champion of ideals associated with the far left.<sup>106</sup> It was Clemenceau himself who would use his influence to further Bonnetain’s colonial career some years later, calling Bonnetain “un vrai colonial, remarquablement doué à tous égards et animé d’un bel entrain [a real colonial, remarkably capable in all respects and animated by good humor].”<sup>107</sup>

It was his sympathy for the poorer classes, which would, over the course of 1882, lead Bonnetain to adopt the Naturalist creed of Émile Zola to defend his own fascination with the disreputable aspects of humanity; the depravity that was commonplace among the urban poor awakened his tolerance for the crudeness that was characteristic of Naturalism. His mother’s illness further focused his Naturalist sympathies onto questions of heredity and hereditary degeneration, which would be the central theme in *Charlot s’amuse*.<sup>108</sup> It was in *Au Tonkin* that he was forced, by both logic and circumstance, to marry the threads of his Radical sympathies for the “union for life” with the pro-colonial

---

<sup>106</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 150-152.

<sup>107</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 40.

<sup>108</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 142-143.



mission to civilize. Bonnetain would attempt to combine the “union for life” from Clémenceau and the Radicals, with the concept of inferior and superior races championed explicitly by Ferry and implicitly by Clémenceau. The resulting relationship is based chiefly on sexual unions between French men and Indochinese women; this would inform the primary inter-cultural relationships between the French and the Vietnamese in both *Au Tonkin* and *L’Opium*. It was a compromise of both Ferry and Clémenceau’s positions, because while Clémenceau refused to overtly qualify races as inferior, Ferry explicitly condemned the “impossible fusion of the races,” around which Bonnetain’s proposed mission in Vietnam was centered.<sup>109</sup> Bonnetain would have it both ways: the Vietnamese are an inferior and separate race (or species) which would die out, but they were also to be regenerated (and civilized) through miscegenation, a phenomenon which underscored the common humanity shared by both the French and the Vietnamese – a hallmark of republican universalism. However, whereas *Au Tonkin*, a work of compiled journalism aimed at promoting colonial expansion in Vietnam, would deal with these relationships largely in theory and avoid the inherent complication of children, *L’Opium*, Bonnetain’s novel set largely in Tonkin, would employ the unflinching realism of the Naturalist movement in exploring individual relationships between French men and the Vietnamese in detail.

### 2.3 Conclusions

---

<sup>109</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978) 65-66, cited in Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 13.

The attitude of Paul Bonnetain towards colonial expansion in Tonkin was a reflection of two main currents in French thought. First, it represented the belief that colonial expansion would ensure French greatness. This idea was central to the pro-colonial arguments of Ferry, Leroy-Beaulieu, and other prominent pro-colonial figures. Second, it was also a reflection of the idea, so concisely summed up by Clémenceau, that rather than launch into military expeditions in the colonies, “j’ai besoin de regarder autour de moi [I need to look around myself],” by which he meant that troops should be reserved for European theaters.<sup>110</sup> Anticipating Clémenceau’s reliance on colonial troops at the end of the First World War, Bonnetain encouraged colonial expansion as a way to bolster French military capabilities: “nous avons les troupes annamites, braves sans fanatisme, dévouées jusqu’au stoïcisme lorsqu’on les traite bien, et supérieure à tous les Mercenaries connus [we have the Annamite troops, brave without fanaticism, dedicated to the point of stoicism when they are well treated, and superior to all known mercenaries].”<sup>111</sup> Thus Bonnetain’s position affirms the necessity of colonial expansion from a military standpoint, by suggesting that military expenditure in the colonies was in fact an investment in the military future of the French – a future which would be determined by the “union for life” between the French and the Vietnamese, as pitted against the Darwinian “struggle for life” which allegedly characterized the bellicose rhetoric of both the British and the Germans. This belief in the value and necessity of cooperation between the French and the Vietnamese as a way to ensure the posterity of both nations, was most strikingly evoked in *Au Tonkin* by Bonnetain’s suggestion that *métissage* was the simplest way to ensure the success of the *mission civilisatrice*.

---

<sup>110</sup> “Politiques Coloniale,” *La Justice*, 29.

<sup>111</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 206.

The *mission civilisatrice* was in many ways an ideology typical of the positivist, anti-clerical, republican liberalism of the Opportunist era in France (1879-1899). Gordon Wright has called the period a wasted opportunity for French republicans, who were too concerned with defeating the church to devote themselves to the pressing social issues of the period, or to properly define the parameters of their parliamentary system.<sup>112</sup>

Adherence to the doctrine of polygenism was symptomatic of this knee-jerk reaction against all things clerical; as Quatrefages insightfully observed about the dominance of polygenism in the French intellectual community, “Avant tout ils voulaient ruiner un dogme [Above all they wished to destroy a doctrine].”<sup>113</sup> Bonnetain, whose vitriolic attitude towards Catholicism is in evidence throughout his work, was particularly illustrative of this anti-clerical need to deny the unity of the human race. Though his enthusiasm for *métissage* indicates a recognition of the universality of the human species, his desire to work in opposition to the church would often overwhelm this more generous impulse, disallowing an adherence to monogenism in light of his anti-clerical republican universalism.

As Daniel Pick has noted in his book *Faces of Degeneration: A European disorder, c. 1848-c.1918*, racial determinism can rightly be painted as an ideological tool used by Europe to exploit its colonial populations, as in the work of Edward Said. However, “‘aggression’ of evolutionary discourse may have had as much to do with

---

<sup>112</sup> Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 223-225. The Opportunist era, as the name suggests, was a period dominated by those politicians who would and could compromise their positions on key issues, in order to maintain power and achieve some part of their objectives. Gambetta referred to this as “the science of the possible,” and Ferry was masterful at employing this strategy to secure funding for his colonial initiatives, among other things.

<sup>113</sup> Quatrefages, *L’Espèce Humaine*, 22.

perceived ‘terrors’, ‘primitiveness’ and fragmentation ‘at home’ as in the colonies.”<sup>114</sup>

Bonnetain’s work, as both a disciple of Zola’s Naturalist school and a colonial commentator, is perhaps the perfect model of this racial democratization of degeneration. While his fascination with hereditary degeneration would begin with a focus on the degeneration of the French race in *Charlot s’amuse*, it would subsequently find its way into his writing about native colonial populations. This relationship between Bonnetain’s critiques of the French and “Annamite” races will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

---

<sup>114</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European disorder, c. 1848-c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37-38.

### 3. BONNETAIN, ZOLA AND DEGENERATION

Paul Bonnetain considered himself “the descendent of a line of materialists.”<sup>115</sup> He was disgusted by the amount of time he had wasted in school, trying to show deference to the Catholic faith in order to compete for the scholarships that went to observant Catholic students. When he reached Paris, he was already firm in his conviction that the Church was a “debilitating organization,” and this sentiment is strongly reflected in *Charlot s’amuse*, a story in which the protagonist and his mother before him are both “debauched” by priests. The novel clearly painted the Catholic Church, and the priesthood in particular, as the root cause of the degenerative spiral into which they were both cast. Both Charlot and his mother are victims of the priests, the celibacy of which fuels in them, “les vieilles colères longuement amassées, les regrets haineux et la bile mauvaise emmagasinée durant le muet martyre de leur démoralisante existence de castrats [the old angers which have long been amassing, hateful regrets and bad bile collected during the silent martyrdom of their demoralizing existences as castrati].”<sup>116</sup> This attitude, as we have seen in the first chapter, was current in anti-clerical circles, to the extent that Bonnetain hoped the overstated anti-clerical attitude in *Charlot s’amuse* would draw some attention away from “onanism” as the theme of the novel.<sup>117</sup>

Bonnetain took many of his cues regarding literary style from the Naturalist movement of Émile Zola, which was a literary expression of the Comtean positivism adopted by Taine, Bernard and others. Bonnetain was also drawn to the positivist strain

---

<sup>115</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 156.

<sup>116</sup> Bonnetain, *Charlot s’amuse*, 112.

<sup>117</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 157-159.

of thought which valued science as the answer to questions which had previously been the domain of the Church. In literature, the adoption of an anti-clerical, positivist stance was most strongly associated with Émile Zola. Zola was, by 1882, hugely successful as a novelist, and he was also well known as a literary theorist and historian. He published numerous tracts explaining his belief in the “science” behind his writing, and confirming his belonging to a long lineage of noted French authors who were also Naturalists in Zola’s estimation.<sup>118</sup> The epigraph to *Charlot s’amuse* in 1883, is the following excerpt from Zola’s 1868 preface to *Thérèse Raquin*:

... In the world of science an accusation of immorality proves nothing whatsoever. I do not know whether my novel is immoral, but I admit that I have never gone out of my way to make it more or less chaste. What I do know is I never for one moment dreamed of putting in the indecencies that moral people are discovering therein, for I wrote every scene, even the most impassioned, with scientific curiosity alone. I defy my judges to find one really licentious page...<sup>119</sup>

### 3.1 Science and Literature

It may seem odd for a novelist to be so highly emphatic about his understanding and adoption of current scientific theory, but this was nothing new. Or rather, it was a new take on a trend that was considerably older than Zola. The increasingly widespread availability of basic education in France from the 1830s, which aimed to produce a population capable of working in industrial factories, also produced “a huge new semi-literate public with an appetite for cheap, easily-read fiction.” To cater to this new readership, newspapers in France (as elsewhere) began to run serial stories known as

---

<sup>118</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 11-12.

<sup>119</sup> Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, trans. Leonard Tancock (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), 24.

‘roman-feuilleton,’ which were strongly sympathetic to the working and lower middle classes and aimed to foment class antagonisms, thus generally leaning to the left politically.<sup>120</sup> At about the same time as the ‘roman-feuilleton’ began to appear, Honoré de Balzac began work on the *Comédie humaine*, a work that would have a profound impact on the literary scene. This sprawling work was Balzac’s attempt to record contemporary French civilization during the two decades from the project’s inception until his death in 1850, and as such the burgeoning scientific community’s theories were not forgotten.<sup>121</sup> His major scientific influences included the biologist Geoffroy de Saint-Hillaire, the physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater, and the phrenologist Franz Joseph Gall, and he very much endeavored to follow a “positivist pattern” which would express the determinism that was typical of a scientific approach. This causal agenda in Balzac’s work is most commonly observed as the expression of the environment in his characters.<sup>122</sup> Balzac’s belief in the importance of environment to the development of human beings was such that he compared the way in which a person’s surrounding’s reflects the individual, to the way a snail’s shell reflects the color of the animal inside.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to his avowed interest in phrenology and physiognomy, Balzac was also an enthusiastic admirer of the work of Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, whose *Histoire Naturelle* he lauded as a work of zoology which he hoped to emulate in his

---

<sup>120</sup> Leonard Tancock, “Introduction,” in Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, 10-11. Naturally, not all the novels that were thus published were of poor quality, and some, such as *Thérèse Raquin*, have become recognized as important works of literature.

<sup>121</sup> Tancock, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Robinson, *French literature in the nineteenth century* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1978), 63-66.

<sup>123</sup> Robinson, *French Literature*, 65.

sprawling work on society.<sup>124</sup> Buffon's work of zoology included a volume on the human animal. Buffon believed that all human beings were of one species – monogenesis – for the simple and obvious fact that interracial unions did not produce sterile offspring. However, his view of the human species was that it was ranged, in all its variety, on a scale at the top of which sat the most civilized (western Europe), and at the bottom of which sat the most barbarous (Native Americans). After Western Europe were the other European states, followed by Asia and then Africa before the Native Americans. The western European is thus at the top of a hierarchy despite the universality of the human species, and Buffon ends up lamenting the fact that “the Negro” can in fact procreate with Europeans, because if this were not so the practice of treating Africans like animals would be much more acceptable.<sup>125</sup> Buffon's reluctant adherence to monogenism underscores an important inconsistency in Bonnetain's thinking about *métissage*: monogenism is much more amenable to miscegenation than polygenesis. Here we see the wasted effort which Gordon Wright has described as the hallmark of republican anti-clericalism in the Opportunist era: Bonnetain is an adherent to polygenism because he is an anti-clerical positivist, yet his doctrine of miscegenation, and indeed the whole doctrine of the *mission civilisatrice*, is rooted in monogenism and Christian universalism. Monogenesis after Buffon was equipped with the hierarchy of races that the *mission civilisatrice* required, but to profess it was to admit clerical sympathies.

Zola was very successful at writing himself into literary history, so much so that his articles on Naturalism and its adherents provided the model for a number of “standard historical studies,” of the literary movement well into the twentieth century, despite their

---

<sup>124</sup> Robinson, *French Literature*, 64.

<sup>125</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 96-100.



highly polemical nature.<sup>126</sup> Balzac was included in Zola's pantheon of Naturalist writers, along with Stendhal and Flaubert. Yet Balzac's personal beliefs regarding political and religious matters would not allow him to be a passive observer of the human condition, and his writing was generally "strongly tempered by a visionary streak."<sup>127</sup> In order to include Balzac in particular, Zola had to blatantly disregard the highly developed nuances and complexities of Balzac's work, which included his religious sentiments.<sup>128</sup>

The Realists would attempt to follow Balzac's lead with regard to producing novels that used the prevailing scientific doctrines of the day to explain the actions of their characters. They professed to take Balzac's philosophy even farther, reproducing reality without any hint of subjectivity, and framing their novels as "the very negation of art."<sup>129</sup> In addition to the influence of the rise of popular scientific knowledge, the injustices and hypocrisies of the Second Empire, "forced all those artists and writers not directly committed for personal or religious reasons into the camp of the socialist opposition."<sup>130</sup> It was under these conditions that Zola would publish the 1868 preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, and thus bring his Naturalist movement to the attention of the general public.<sup>131</sup>

Zola borrowed the term "Naturalisme," which he had been using since 1866, chiefly from Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893).<sup>132</sup> Taine is regarded as "the great prophet of

---

<sup>126</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Robinson, *French Literature*, 66.

<sup>128</sup> Baguley, *The Entropic Vision*, 67-69.

<sup>129</sup> Tancock, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>130</sup> Tancock, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>131</sup> Tancock, "Introduction," 13-14.

<sup>132</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 55.

determinism in the second half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>133</sup> He was widely known to have espoused race as one of the three main determinants of a person’s behavior, and by the time Bonnetain was a student “his works were standard textbooks in every school.”<sup>134</sup> For Taine, as for Voltaire before him, human beings were not one species, but many: these were the races. He considered the universality of the human species to be one of the major flaws in the trends of Enlightenment thought.<sup>135</sup> The bishop of Taine’s diocese publicly attacked Taine during the Second Empire for his materialism, and he was well published and highly esteemed as a philosopher, literary critic, and historian respectively by the time Zola began to sell a lot of books.<sup>136</sup>

Taine was first and foremost used as a way for Zola to proclaim that the manner in which he wrote was “scientific.” The central idea that Zola gleaned from Taine is that knowledge of race, environment and historical moment (“race, milieu, moment”) must be obtained in order to understand a writer. Zola extrapolated from this atavistic assertion, that these three factors were the most significant “in the development of the individual, and thence of society as a whole.”<sup>137</sup> Taine’s *History of English Literature* (1863-1869) claimed to proffer the results of “scientific analysis” which would explain the principle

---

<sup>133</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 114.

<sup>134</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, vol. 2 of *France 1848-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 13.

<sup>135</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 107, 117. He shared this belief in “polygenesis” with Buffon, Le Bon, Gobineau, and Renan .

<sup>136</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the Third French Republic, 1870-1940: M-Z* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 993-994. Taine was forced, ironically, to seek refuge from the Church in his connections to the Empire, through which he was able to obtain a position as an examiner for admission to St.-Cyr and a teaching position at the École des beaux arts.

<sup>137</sup> Robinson, *French Literature*, 67.

characteristics of the English “race.”<sup>138</sup> As Zola said of *Thérèse Raquin*, Taine’s deterministic take on psychology offered a way for the novelist to, “[choose] people completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature,” and therefore to be able to claim that, whatever he was depicting, his “object was first and foremost a scientific one.”<sup>139</sup> Zola was able to call himself Taine’s disciple and express his desire for Taine to be the great literary critic of his age. However, the fact that Taine took no particular notice of Zola and the influence of Claude Bernard’s work in experimental medicine were among the chief reasons that Zola chose to structure his essay, “Le Roman Experimental,” around the ideas of Bernard in 1880.<sup>140</sup> My point here is that Zola sought scientific legitimacy above all else, with the possible exception of commercial success, and the two were not at all exclusive of one another.

Bonnetain was also desirous of commercial success, and was considerably more ‘hungry’ than his “Master,” Zola. It has commonly been speculated in recent scholarship, as it was at the time of the publication of *Charlot s’amuse*, that Bonnetain (or “Bonnemain” as he has been dubbed by some of the more hilarious literary critics and scholars) had used the trope of masturbation chiefly as a means of publicizing his first

---

<sup>138</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 104.

<sup>139</sup> Tancock, “Introduction,” 22.

<sup>140</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 56. Taine’s *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863) was at least as much of an influence on Zola as was Bernard, even by 1880. In “Le Roman Experimental,” Zola claims that he follows Bernard’s method so closely that one could almost replace the word ‘doctor’ with the word ‘novelist.’ In fact, Zola does *not* follow Bernard’s method at every turn as he claims: the crux of his argument is still based very much in Taine’s theories, “with quotations and paraphrases recently culled from Claude Bernard’s book on the experimental method.”

foray into novel writing.<sup>141</sup> While this may very well be true, Bonnetain's interest in medical explanations of degeneration was much more than the mere acknowledgement of a literary vogue or a publicity stunt. The hospitalization and suicide of his mother naturally had a pivotal influence on the young writer, and would initiate a lifelong struggle with the ideas of heredity, psychology and degeneration.<sup>142</sup>

### 3.2 Degeneration

The concept of hereditary degeneration, and the popular use of the term, was born of an interesting blend of metaphysics and materialism that surfaced with the 1857 publication of *Traité des dégénérescences physique, intellectuelle et morales de l'espèce humaine* [*Treatise on the physical, intellectual and moral degenerations of the human species*] written by Bénédict-Augustin Morel (1809-1873).<sup>143</sup> His theory, which strongly reflected his Catholicism, made madness out to be an expression of the “decay of man” from the perfect state in which he had left the Garden of Eden. The study of the mind was, after all, the “preserve” of theologians, as it was traditionally viewed as being inextricably tied to the soul. Consequently, doctors, the majority of whom were “conformist Christians,” were quite tentative in their conclusions that could be seen as an intrusion into the spiritual domain. Morel's ‘scientific’ theory of mental illness was therefore able to gain a foothold *because* of the ways in which it related to the concepts

---

<sup>141</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 111.

<sup>142</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 8, 143.

<sup>143</sup> Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 74.

of “moral decay” and hereditarily begotten sin common in Christian traditions.<sup>144</sup> This concept was most constantly in evidence in the doctrine of Original Sin. Common to both Protestant and Catholic traditions during the seventeenth century period of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the doctrine held that Adam had tainted humanity both physically and spiritually with hereditary sin.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, the practice of saying prayers for the dead in order to ease their passage through Purgatory was specifically endorsed by the Council of Trent in 1562, adding credence to the idea that the living were saddled with the sins of their forbearers.<sup>146</sup> Morel, in a sense, created a scientific facade to legitimize the sort of moral heredity doctrines that churches had long held. Alcohol, long considered malevolent by Christian groups, was also vilified by Morel as the main cause of degeneracy, as was opium “in the East,” although industrialization was doing its share of damage as well. Degeneracy was epidemic, and the prognosis would continue to worsen until there was a moral improvement in the population.<sup>147</sup>

Morel’s theory had come to light at a time when French psychiatrists were trying to establish organic causes for mental illness, and thus “reintegrate their profession into the mainstream of organic medicine.” That the theory of hereditary degeneration coincided with the stirring renewal of experimental medicine under Claude Bernard ultimately worked to the theory’s advantage because of Bernard’s belief in the importance of “internal” balance to an organism’s health:

---

<sup>144</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 830-834.

<sup>145</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1871), 2:152-163.

<sup>146</sup> Edward Craig, ed., *Nihilism to Quantum Mechanics*, vol. 7 of *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 838.

<sup>147</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 834.

...By adapting notions of equilibrium and disequilibrium to pathological mental states, psychiatrists could analyze mental illness in terms of the amount and distribution of energy in the body's nervous system, and correlate these assessments with precise observations of tissue pathology. Both methods aided psychiatry's quest for scientific legitimacy and helped increase the prestige and currency of psychiatric discourse.<sup>148</sup>

The theory's influence also expanded thanks in large part to its being developed by Valentin Magnan (1835-1916), director of the St. Anne asylum in Paris for forty-five years, and one of the most highly esteemed psychiatrists at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>149</sup> Under Magnan, degeneration theory would reach its zenith. Like Morel, Magnan saw alcohol as one of the primary causes of degeneration, and he claimed, at the end of his career, that forty-seven percent of the madness that he had treated had been brought on, at least in part, by alcohol. Yet he saw alcoholism as only one facet of a hereditary disease that led, in defined stages, to madness.<sup>150</sup> Careful genealogical assessments were performed to assess the degree of degeneration, along with an analysis of an individual's exposure to "toxins" such as alcohol, tobacco, venereal disease, or an unhygienic home or work environment.<sup>151</sup>

In *Charlot's amuse*, it is repeatedly made clear that Bonnetain wishes to couch his opinions about hereditary degeneration in accepted scientific theory as much as possible, so much so that "parts of the novel cannot be understood without a medical dictionary."<sup>152</sup> In order to better understand, and thus better relate the science behind Charlot's degeneration, he also attended lectures by the famous pioneering neurologist

---

<sup>148</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 74.

<sup>149</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 834.

<sup>150</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 834.

<sup>151</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 75.

<sup>152</sup> Greaves 1965, 236.

Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893).<sup>153</sup> During the years 1881-1884, the members of the psychiatric community were in an ongoing debate regarding the curability of the mentally ill.<sup>154</sup> Charcot's groundbreaking area of study was hysteria. He was popularly known to have exposed the link between hysteria and emotions, and was therefore "one of the most influential men of his time."<sup>155</sup> Through his professed ability to "sense" a disease, and its causes, Charcot determined that most hysterics were women, and that hysteria itself could be quelled by applying pressure to the ovaries and/or breasts in women, and the testicles in men. Hysteria became a highly fashionable diagnosis, and it was under its auspices that Bonnetain's mother was committed to the Salpêtrière. Under Charcot's direction, the hospital had separated the hysterics and epileptics from the other "madwomen," in a wing where they could be personally supervised by Charcot and his team of disciples.<sup>156</sup> It was here that Bonnetain's mother would commit suicide. In *Charlot s'amuse* there is a scene where Charlot goes to hear a lecture by Charcot, and is shocked to see his own mother

---

<sup>153</sup> Greaves 1965, 236.

<sup>154</sup> Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness & Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 76-77. This debate was brought on by the Ferry government's proposed divorce bill, which included insanity in one of the spouses as grounds for divorce. The bill was passed in 1884, but the insanity clause had been removed, "owing largely to the depositions in 1882 of four of the giants of French psychiatry: Blanche, Charcot, Legrand du Saulle, and Valentin Magnan." The professional opinions that these men offered were against the clause chiefly because it would imply "the powerlessness of psychiatry." (Ian Dowbiggin, *Inheriting Madness: Professionalization and Psychiatric Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 142) Their claim was that, "although hereditary predisposition was a highly important factor in the production of insanity, it did not always signify incurability." (142)

<sup>155</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 857.

<sup>156</sup> Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 857-861.

brought before Charcot's audience as an example of the physiological manifestations of hysteria.<sup>157</sup>

Charcot and Magnan published a "classic" paper in 1882 that explained homosexuality as merely one of a variety of the possible symptomatic embodiments of "degeneracy," which they regarded as being "consequences of masturbation or sexual exhaustion, which have 'weakened' the 'natural' instincts and opened the door to obsessive ideas."<sup>158</sup> This explains the sheer variety of Charlot's "perversions," though it is still unclear whether the novel was "a self-consciously sensationalistic knock-off of naturalism," or, rather, "a literary historical event that outlines the issues and concerns of the contemporary French literary scene."<sup>159</sup> Perhaps it was both. In any case, though Bonnetain may indeed have intended to comment upon "the potentially questionable uses of science in the creation and reception of naturalist works," he was certainly not questioning the general idea of racial degeneration which haunted French thought in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>160</sup>

Many of the questions raised in *Charlot s'amuse* regarding the problem of degeneration in France, carry over into *Au Tonkin*. In this second book, Bonnetain the journalist is unquestionably a fearful (and dismal) believer in degeneration. This seems to

---

<sup>157</sup> Bonnetain, *Charlot s'amuse*, 293-294. The possibility that "Charlot" is in some sense an attack on "Charcot," seems strong given the evidence, though it has not been entertained in any publication I could find. It should also be remembered that, as Bonnetain noted in his follow-up to the "Manifeste des Cinq" in *Le Figaro* on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1887, Dr. Charcot was instrumental in Bonnetain's legal victory when he was brought up on charges surrounding the immorality of *Charlot s'amuse*. The doctor was brought in to testify to the medical authenticity of the depiction of hereditary degeneration.

<sup>158</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 111-112.

<sup>159</sup> Leonard Koos, "Touchy subjects: naturalist influence and/or naturalist parody in Paul Bonnetain's *Charlot s'amuse*," *Excavatio* no. 13 (2000), 187.

<sup>160</sup> Koos, "Touchy subjects," 187.



suggest that Bonnetain was at least sometimes a serious adherent to the scientism of his time. The following passage from *Au Tonkin*, is useful in that it demonstrates the seriousness with which Bonnetain did approach the idea of racial degeneration among the French:

Elle n'est plus à plaider, la cause des colonies. On a SCIENTIFIQUEMENT démontré que l'expansion transocéanique s'imposait à nous, inéluctable. Pour qui douterait encore de cette fatale nécessité, un coup d'oeil sur la carte du monde suffira. [...] La vieille France est devenue trop étroite et l'activité de notre civilisation a besoin d'un champ nouveau pour ne pas s'étioler dans l'apogée de son repos, pour ne pas s'éteindre, anémique à force de pléthore rentrée. [...] Rome aurait disparu, non colonisatrice.

Le ferait-on sans frissonner, ce rêve: notre race vaincue, amoindrie, absorbée, notre sol envahi, découpé en morceaux, et – vengeance stérile – notre langue subsistant seule, avec les débris de notre art, dans une survie dont les Barbares jouiraient ainsi que d'un luxe?

Un rêve, c'est un rêve! Cependant notre race diminue, notre sang s'appauvrit, et le globe sans nous se remanie, travaillé par les poussées effrayantes des peuples. Formidable, la race anglo-saxonne monte comme la mer. Avant cinquante ans, aux États-Unis, cent millions d'habitants grouilleront, qui trouveront bien vite leur patrie insuffisante. A cette même époque, la Confédération australienne sera puissante assez pour imposer son arbitrage à de vieilles puissances continentales, et l'ouverture du canal de Panama la leur rendra presque aussi proche que l'Inde aujourd'hui. Quelle figure ferons-nous alors sur le globe?...

[No longer does it need to be pleaded, the case for colonies. We have SCIENTIFICALLY demonstrated that transoceanic expansion is imperative to us, inescapably. For those who would continue to doubt this fatal necessity, a glance at the map of the world will suffice. [...] The old France has become too constricted and the activity of our civilization is in need of a new domain so as not to weaken itself in the apogee of its repose, so as not to snuff itself out, made anemic by the force of the plethora crashing in. [...] Rome would have disappeared as a non-colonizer.

Can we envision without shuddering, this dream: our race defeated, lessened, absorbed, our soil invaded, cut into pieces and – a sterile vengeance – our language alone subsisting, with the debris of our art, in a form of survival that the Barbarians will delight in just as they would in luxury?

A dream, it's a dream! Meanwhile our race is diminishing, its blood is thinning, and the globe is reorganizing itself without us, wrought by the frightful thrusts of the nations. Formidable, the Anglo-Saxon race rises like the sea. Within fifty years, in the United States, a hundred million inhabitants will be milling about, who will soon find their fatherland insufficient. In this same period, the Australian Confederation will be strong enough to impose its arbitration on old

continental powers, and the opening of the Panama Canal will bring them almost as close as India is today. What image will we then cast on the globe?...]<sup>161</sup>

France's second attempt at a colonial empire has commonly been seen as a response to developments in Europe, and Bonnetain certainly adds credence to this thesis when he refers to the "inescapable" necessity of overseas expansion. Bonnetain was a patriot, but he saw Germany as the "bogeyman" which *revanchists* harped on for political reasons, not as a feasible way to shore up and secure the greatness of France.<sup>162</sup> The idea, popularized by Renan in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, that the personified nation had lost vital organs in Alsace-Lorraine, and that these needed to be compensated for, was a standard line of reasoning after 1871.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, much of what Bonnetain has to say compliments or reiterates Ferry's assertions about the necessity of overseas expansion and the dangers of taking an openly bellicose attitude towards Germany. As Greaves points out at several junctures, Ferry was one of the biggest supporters of the novelist's desire to see France reinvigorated through her colonies.<sup>164</sup>

Zola also saw the colonial setting for regenerating the flagging French race, because it represented an escape from the degenerative environment of the Second Empire. "Degeneracy is the very basis," of the Rougon-Macquart series of twenty novels, written between 1870 and 1893.<sup>165</sup> In these novels, Zola tells the story of two family lines stemming from the "genetrix of the race, Adélaïde Fouque": the Rougons by marriage,

---

<sup>161</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 193-194.

<sup>162</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 196.

<sup>163</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 79.

<sup>164</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 39, 156, 157. Greaves never explains this assertion further, and I am assuming he is simply referring to Ferry's well-known and often reiterated colonial policy.

<sup>165</sup> A. E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 71.

and the Macquarts through her “concubinage with the village drunkard.”<sup>166</sup> In the preface to the first novel in the series, *La fortune des Rougon*, Zola remarked that a race was the physiological expression of the accumulated “accidents” of its heredity, accidents of the nerves and the blood.<sup>167</sup> In the final novel of the series, *Dr. Pascal*, a member of the Macquart line marries a peasant, and the son which is born to them is described as having the youthful vigor particular to a race “qui vont se retremper dans la terre [which has replanted itself in the soil].”<sup>168</sup> And in a later novel, *Fécondité* (1899), a son of the family line with which the book concerns itself laments that, if he cannot follow his cousin into the “other France” in the Sudan where the “race” has absorbed new vigor, then he will “die of shameful sloth.”<sup>169</sup>

The colonial expansion of the British is another reason for promoting the colonies that Bonnetain shares with Ferry, though the journalist naturally speaks much more freely than the prime minister. For Bonnetain, the battle between the French and Anglo-Saxon races, would be a “Darwinist” struggle in which one of the two races would be wiped out.<sup>170</sup> Later he exclaims, while commenting on the “theft” of the Suez Canal, that the French will not be able to take advantage of their North African territories because they don’t have enough children to produce colonists.<sup>171</sup> It is at this juncture that Bonnetain introduces his proposal for the “ideal colony.” The French are better colonizers than the

---

<sup>166</sup> Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*, 74.

<sup>167</sup> Émile Zola, *La fortune des Rougon* (1870)

[http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola\\_Emile](http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola_Emile), 3. Accessed June 25, 2009.

<sup>168</sup> Émile Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893)

[http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola\\_Emile](http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola_Emile), 127. Accessed June 25, 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Émile Zola, *Fruitfulness [Fécondité]*, trans. Ernest Alfred Vizetelly (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1900), 471, 485.

<sup>170</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 197.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

English specifically because French men will unashamedly copulate with “inferior races,” and they produce more handsome, fertile and invigorated Métis than the English. Therefore the French could make the “colony without colonists,” simply by leaving behind their handsome Métis.<sup>172</sup>

Robert Nye has shown that, while degeneration was by no means seen as an exclusively French problem, it manifested itself in the “socially marginal citizens” in other parts of Europe, but “in France degeneration was a *national* syndrome producing a *national* disease.”<sup>173</sup> In this view of French population growth, the topics surrounding sexuality were indistinguishable from anxieties surrounding the health of the nation as a whole.<sup>174</sup> Between 1872 and 1911, the French population grew by only 10%, while German and British populations grew by 58% and 43% respectively, and this was seen as a direct result of degeneration.<sup>175</sup> As in the case of Charlot, degeneration was a hereditary accumulation of traits acquired through degenerate living conditions and behavior – a degenerate environment.

This focus on the hereditary influence of environment is very much a reflection on pre-Darwinian theories of evolution in France. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s (1744-1829) theory of evolution, which he described as “transformisme” in his book *Philosophie zoologique* (1809), stated that in order for an organism to survive, its “organic economy” had to kept at an approximate equilibrium with the “milieu in which it lived.” It would continue to exist in France as “a kind of heredity theory writ large,” until the end of the nineteenth century, despite developments in evolutionary biology. If a given organism

---

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>173</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 77.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 78.

were adaptable enough to be able to compensate for a change in environment, these changes in its “organic economy” would be hereditarily preserved as traits that descendants would exhibit. Thus, the degeneration of the French race of which Bonnetain spoke was a response to a “milieu” that was not conducive to its development, namely modern France. These responses – essentially adaptations to an unhealthy environment – would manifest themselves as pathologies.<sup>176</sup> One such pathology was the hysteria that was diagnosed in the case of Bonnetain’s mother.

This view of modern France as an unhealthy environment, “thinning” the blood of its citizens, explains Bonnetain’s enthusiasm for colonial expansion as a remedy for degeneration. For his Naturalist “Master” Zola, the only hope of reversing the degenerative heredity in the Rougon-Macquart family line was a “back-to-the-land movement.”<sup>177</sup> It is interesting to note that in *Charlot s’amuse*, one priest suggests to a group of fellow priests who are guilty of committing (or wanting to commit) sexually depraved acts with Charlot, that they should board a ship sailing for Madagascar where a Christian school is being founded: “vous irez passer votre rut là-bas, sur les petits nègres, voire petites négresses... ça vous changera [you’ll go pass your rut there, on the little Negroes, even little Negresses... that will change you]...”<sup>178</sup> Bonnetain has taken the regenerating quality of new soil as proposed by Zola one step further, by claiming that sexual interaction with the native populations – themselves a Lamarckian expression of the soil – could also produce the desired regenerative effects. The passage also allows another melodramatic stab at the Catholic faith, and its supposedly degenerative effects.

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>177</sup> Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*, 78.

<sup>178</sup> Bonnetain, *Charlot s’amuse*, 114.

This national obsession with the disintegration of the French “species,” which Bonnetain had obviously allowed to shape his views on the importance of colonies, was quite clearly projected onto the Vietnamese, a “race” which was exhibiting much more advanced signs of degeneration:

...Peintres, statuaires, poètes, les fils de l’Annam patoisent, et toujours patoiseront. L’esclavage les a marqués au front à jamais. Ce sont des enfants, de grands enfants, mais terriblement vieux et cadues, se transmettant un sang vicié. Le nègre robuste et sain n’est point désespérant comme eux, et sa naïveté peut faire rêver d’une régénération. L’Annamite, lui, ne se régénérera pas. Sa race prolifique survivra longtemps peut-être, car, ayant l’opium, sinon l’alcool, et possédant à l’état endémique nos maladies contagieuses, il est de longue date vacciné contre certains fléaux, ordinaire cortège de la civilisation occidentale: parce que surtout, il trouvera en nous des conquérants faciles prêts aux alliances fécondes; mais il ne dépassera point le niveau social auquel il est parvenu.

L’art n’est qu’un mot; c’est la résultante de facultés spéciales aux intelligences fières, que développent une traditionnelle liberté et la croyance en la Patrie. Ici rien de tout cela. Rien, pas même un de ces cultes qui tout en surexcitant les imaginations primitives éveillent la conscience de l’individu. Des Français établis depuis vingt ans en ce pays et parlant sa langue, m’ont contredit, mais sans conviction. D’aucuns affirmaient qu’il existe des races à la fois fanatiques et passionnées d’indépendance, chez qui tout art semble lettre morte. Ils n’en purent citer.

[Painters, sculptors, poets, the sons of Annam mimic poorly, and will always mimic poorly. Slavery has branded their brows for eternity. These are children, large children, but terribly old and expired, passing on a tainted blood. The robust and healthy Negro is not hopeless like they are, and his naïveté can allow dreams of regeneration. The Annamite, he will not regenerate. His prolific race may perhaps survive a long time, since, having opium, if not alcohol, and carrying to an endemic degree our contagious diseases, he has long since been vaccinated against certain plagues, which are the ordinary retinue of Western civilization: mostly because he will find in us easy conquerors prepared for fecund alliances. But he will not exceed the social level to which he has risen.

Art is not only a word; it is the resultant of faculties specific to proud intellects, which develop a traditional liberty and the belief in the Fatherland. Nothing here of all that. Nothing, not even one of those cults that awakens the individual consciousness while it over excites primitive imaginations. Frenchmen that have been established here for twenty years and speak their language, have contradicted me, but without conviction. None of them could affirm that there exist races that are at once fanatical and passionate about independence, for whom all art seems a dead letter. They could not cite any.]<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 236.

From here, Bonnetain goes on to explain how even the Arabs, a race whose art is “latent,” can still at least produce poetry which rivals any other “Oriental” poetry, and at the end of his diatribe against the “Annamite race,” he declares that they are a race of slaves, who are “morally eunuchs!”<sup>180</sup> It is not hard to see how perceiving the Vietnamese as a race of slaves could be advantageous to the French colonizer. A race that has already hardened itself to opium, and that possesses antibodies to the diseases of Europe, but which is without any pride in their “Fatherland” would make the perfect labor force – as Bonnetain says of the Vietnamese, “Non suffisamment sauvage pour disparaître sous l’invasion européenne, comme les êtres de race absolument inférieure, il n’a pas non plus l’énergie dont, ailleurs, avant de céder, les autochtones au sang pur s’inspirent pour d’inutiles mais héroïques résistances [Not sufficiently wild to disappear under a European invasion, like completely inferior beings, he is also without the energy that, otherwise, before surrendering, inspires Aborigines of pure blood to futile but heroic resistances.]”<sup>181</sup> Bonnetain declares that “art is virility,” and, as such, “The Annamite race is dead.”<sup>182</sup> This is very much in line with the Lamarckian belief that an organism must reflect its environment, for Bonnetain decided very early on during his first days in Indochina that, “Elle ne dort pas, cette terre; elle est morte [She is not sleeping, this soil; she is dead].”<sup>183</sup> He has reached this conclusion about the Vietnamese despite being told otherwise by longtime Indochina ‘hands’ who spoke the native language. This is, to a certain extent, an example of the objectionable nature of

---

<sup>180</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 237.

<sup>181</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 209.

<sup>182</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 244.

<sup>183</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 40.

Bonnetain's thoughts in general. As Greaves put it, "indignation seems to have been one of his main characteristics."<sup>184</sup> But this muddling of attitudes towards the Vietnamese is also a reflection of the current trends in racist thought circulating in France while Bonnetain was writing.

### 3.3 Popular Racism

The three chief French thinkers that are seen as the vital progenitors of racist doctrine during the second half of the nineteenth century are Taine, Renan and Gobineau. As Todorov notes, the scientific determinism which both Zola and Bonnetain admired and wrote with in mind, hinged on two assumptions: that all human activity was entirely determined by material factors (which include race), and thus that ethics should be subordinated to science (which, of course, includes racism).<sup>185</sup> Gobineau, for example, saw no hope for the dominant white race, which would be "mongrelized" if it interbred, or, if it did not, would simply continue to decline until it reached the point of sterility and died out.<sup>186</sup> As such, all a person could do was to resign himself to the unassailable tide of history.<sup>187</sup> Bonnetain may have read Gobineau, but he had definitely read Taine and Renan, and Renan in particular was much more contemporary.<sup>188</sup> Renan, unlike Gobineau, believed that "the regeneration of the inferior or bastardized races by the

---

<sup>184</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 152-153

<sup>185</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 114.

<sup>186</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 73.

<sup>187</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 124.

<sup>188</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 121, 123, 441, 571, etc.



superior races is in the providential order of humanity.”<sup>189</sup> The Vietnamese were commonly singled out by French writers as one of these “bastardized” races; the name “Indochine” is meant to imply this intermediate position, geographically, culturally, and, as Bonnetain states, morally.<sup>190</sup> Moral castration has reduced this “race of slaves” to simple, childish, “monkey” imitators of the great Chinese and Japanese cultures.<sup>191</sup> It is due to this cultural and political deference, these “traditional slaveries,” under China in particular that Bonnetain feels that the Vietnamese will easily bend to the will of the French. This heritage, combined with the “laws of social heredity,” has reduced the Vietnamese to a “race” that has been “fatally marked for domestication.”<sup>192</sup> The extent to which these views would be (and had been) repudiated by the Vietnamese on all fronts is largely common knowledge.

Bonnetain states that the “Annamite” will never surpass the social level he has attained, and this is because of the limitations of his race. Yet, Bonnetain feels, they may find their relations with the French to be “fecund.” So what exactly does this mean? As Jennifer Yee has pointed out in her book length discussion on colonial literature, far from being the idealized blending of races that *métissage* was sometimes painted as in the periods before and after 1871-1914, the rise of the popular scientific perspective in the final decades of the nineteenth century would reduce the *métis* to an embarrassing eventuality in the eyes of the French colonizer.<sup>193</sup> But in this early phase of “pacification”

---

<sup>189</sup> Earnest Renan, “La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France” (1871) in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947-1961), 1:390, cited in Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 113.

<sup>190</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 237; Yee, *Clichés*, 308.

<sup>191</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 237-238.

<sup>192</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 208-209.

<sup>193</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 286-287.

and exploration Bonnetain suggests that most of the interracial “alliances” were in passing. The Vietnamese are pleased that chance has given them white, European masters who would not shirk from “regenerating” the Vietnamese “race.”<sup>194</sup> This reading of the situation can be fruitfully compared with the sort of reception the French actually did receive in other parts of Indochina, such as in Lower Cochinchina in 1861 where stupefaction and horror were the overriding sentiments of the population, and where local officials refused to collaborate with the French for fear of being tortured or massacred by their fellow citizens.<sup>195</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusions

We have seen the way in which Bonnetain, a proud materialist, was able to use the scientific determinism of his age to justify the brutal “pacification” of the Vietnamese. The loss of the Franco-Prussian War had wounded France deeply, and Bonnetain was among a growing number of French liberals who saw colonial expansion under the auspices of Ferry’s *mission civilisatrice* as the path of least resistance to “regenerating” the French “race.” Bonnetain could promote the military defeat and subjugation of the Vietnamese because these people without any sense of morality were hardly people at all, “Animal immusclé, sans dignité et sans courage [Scrawny animal,

---

<sup>194</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 209. This stance could be said to reinforce Renan’s assertion in a letter to Gobineau that a “very small quantity of noble blood infused into a population suffices to ennoble it.” (Renan, *Oeuvres*, 1:204, cited in Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 113).

<sup>195</sup> Nguyen Van Phong, *La Société Vietnamiennne*, 45.

without dignity and without courage].”<sup>196</sup> The degeneration that Bonnetain first portrayed in *Charlot s’amuse* as part of the epidemic which he and many other contemporary French writers felt was dragging down the French race, could supposedly be seen in its more advanced stages among the Vietnamese. Furthermore, as Renan had explained in 1871, just as conquests between “equal races” must be avoided (i.e. between Germany and France), the “regeneration” of “inferior races” was to be promoted as beneficial to humanity because it would “ennoble” these “inferior populations.”<sup>197</sup> Clearly, as Bonnetain understood things, these populations included the Vietnamese. These people could never be expected to progress beyond the level of slaves without the “alliances” which French men deigned to have with their women, couplings which were “always productive” according to Bonnetain.<sup>198</sup> In this way, Bonnetain’s work accentuates the tension between the anti-clerical need to subscribe to polygenism and its hierarchy of fixed races, and the republican desire for universal liberty, fraternity, and equality. The answer for Bonnetain was simply to replace that which is materially inferior, with that which is superior. As Jennifer Yee has noted in a 2003 article, the French obsession with *métissage* has continued in a very similar vein to the present, although the logic has shifted from Bonnetain’s white supremacy, to a disavowal of the existence of races which betrays its own obsession with racial difference: “There are no such things as human ‘races’, and we must mix them as much as possible to make sure of it.”<sup>199</sup>

Thus, in order to fulfill their “devoir” as Frenchmen to civilize the Vietnamese, the soldiers with whom Bonnetain was marching needed only to avail themselves of

---

<sup>196</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 209.

<sup>197</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 113.

<sup>198</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 209.

<sup>199</sup> Yee, “*Métissage* in France,” 415.

Vietnamese women. However, as the next section will show, the allure of the exotic would be saddled with the danger of the decadent. The intermediate nature of Vietnam in the French estimation was applied not only to its geography and its culture, but also to the gender of its citizens.

#### 4. EXOTICISM AND THE NATURALIST COLONIAL NOVEL

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Bonnetain took many of his cues regarding literary style from the Naturalist movement of Émile Zola. Though Zola himself never wrote any truly colonial novels, Bonnetain, for his part, was the first in an entire school of French colonial writers who considered themselves Naturalists after Zola's model, wherein racial influences dominated those of the environment, and contemporary scientific and medical theories were displayed in the characters.<sup>200</sup> Balzac's stress on the primacy of environment and Zola's stress on the primacy of heredity were both present in Bonnetain's Naturalism.<sup>201</sup> Balzac and Zola were not, however, the only literary influences on Bonnetain's writing, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Anyone studying French colonial fiction would be excused at this point for asking if it was not, in fact, Pierre Loti who had introduced the popular racial determinism of the period to colonial fiction by way of exoticism.<sup>202</sup> Loti was recognized and celebrated as France's pre-eminent exoticist writer during his lifetime. As a gauge of Loti's popularity and influence, it should be remembered that he was chosen over Zola in 1891 for entrance into the Académie Française.<sup>203</sup> To be sure, Loti was very much a racialist and a polygenist, and his novels set in Japan (*Madame Chrysanthème*) and Africa (*Le Roman*

---

<sup>200</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 17-20. Popular Naturalist colonial authors to follow Bonnetain were Marius and Ary Leblond, and Paul Vigné d'Octon.

<sup>201</sup> On the importance of environment for Balzac: A. J. Krailsheimer, "Introduction," in Honoré de Balzac, *Père Gourot*, A. J. Krailsheimer trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), xviii.

<sup>202</sup> Alex G. Hargreaves, *The Colonial Experience in French Fiction: A Study of Pierre Loti, Ernest Psichari and Pierre Mille* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>203</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 18ff.

*d'un spahi*) are studies in dehumanization through the implementation of racist stereotypes: Africans are insatiable in their lust, the Japanese are a silly, doll-like people, and both Asians and Africans look like monkeys.<sup>204</sup> What separates Loti's exoticism from the Naturalist colonial perspective pioneered by Bonnetain with *Au Tonkin*, are the detailed explanations of the racial determinism found in Bonnetain's writing, and the fact that Bonnetain was an avowed disciple of Zola.<sup>205</sup> This chapter will begin by tracing the thread of French exoticism that leads to Bonnetain, paying particular attention to Loti because he immediately preceded Bonnetain as a commentator on the French "pacification" of Tonkin, and because Loti's popularity put him in a class of his own. As a consequence, Bonnetain felt it beholden of him to replicate Loti's popularity, as he indicated in the preface to *Au Tonkin*, which was written as a letter to the Editor in Chief of *Le Figaro*:

En même temps, en effet, que vous me permettiez de compléter mon tour du monde par un superbe voyage, vous me faisiez un honneur très grand. Il faudrait même dire très périlleux, car votre correspondant temporaire, mon prédécesseur, Pierre Loti, avait, le merveilleux artiste, gâté votre public.... [At the same time as you, in effect, have permitted me to complete my trip round the world with a superb voyage, you have done me a very great honor. One could even say very perilous, as your temporary correspondent, my predecessor, Pierre Loti, had, the marvelous artist, spoiled your public...] <sup>206</sup>

Thus Bonnetain concedes cheekily that, much to his chagrin, he must also become a disciple of Loti's if he is to enter into the literary world of the exotic. Yee has suggested that "colonial" novelists of the Naturalist school, among whom Bonnetain is included, differ from Loti, the pre-eminent exoticist of the period, in two important ways: they are self-professed disciples of Zola, and they explain the racial determinism to which Loti

---

<sup>204</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 18; Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 316-321.

<sup>205</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 18.

<sup>206</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, ii.

only alludes. I will show that a third difference is both simple and important: much in the way that Loti does not explain his racialism, he also does not elucidate his feelings regarding colonialism, whereas Bonnetain does. The importance of this difference lies in the fact that Loti's feelings regarding the Vietnamese seem to be very much in line with those of Bonnetain, and that, contrary to the thinking of many scholars (past and present), Loti was not an anti-colonial thinker, but rather an antiquarian and a sentimentalist, facts which have been obscured by some of his characteristic tendencies towards "going native," as we shall see.

The second part of this chapter will look at Bonnetain's thoughts on interpersonal relations between French and Vietnamese individuals. The discussion will center on Bonnetain's novel *L'Opium*, though parts of *Au Tonkin* will also be considered. *L'Opium* tells the story of a young Parisian writer who takes a chancellorship in Tonkin to escape his stiflingly public life in Paris; he becomes addicted to opium, and has a series of unfortunate public and private misfortunes which culminate in his death from opium use. This discussion will focus on two main ideas: first, the widely held opinion in early French accounts of the Vietnamese that the Vietnamese were androgynous in appearance,<sup>207</sup> and second, the development in *L'Opium* of the idea proposed by Bonnetain in *Au Tonkin*, that the French could civilize the Vietnamese by interbreeding with them. I will show that Bonnetain's brand of exoticism fails where Loti's succeeds precisely because Bonnetain does not maintain a necessary tension between the sameness and otherness of the exotic, and that this is due in large part to his desire to approach

---

<sup>207</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 192.

literature as an extension of science after the Naturalist creed of Zola.<sup>208</sup> I will also look at Bonnetain's commentary on the androgyny of the Vietnamese, and the ways in which his words reflect both neo-Lamarckian views on sexual dimorphism, and French fears about fin-de-siècle decadence.

#### 4.1 French Exoticism

According to literary critic and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov, ideal exoticism can be described as the inverse of ideal or absolute nationalism: the country that is *not* one's own is superior. Yet, by definition, that which is wholly known is not exotic, and thus exoticism aspires to the paradoxical goal of "praise without knowledge." The exotic is usually used to foil what is known, and it is not so much a "valorization of others" as it is a critique of one's own culture. Thus, an exoticist describes an ideal, usually *his* ideal, rather than reality when he deals with the exotic.<sup>209</sup> The concept of a Golden Age in the distant, unsophisticated past was not new to the European imagination when the great voyages of discovery were being undertaken and recorded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; however, the discovery of the New World and the narratives which it generated, particularly those of Columbus and Vespucci, gave new life to this tendency towards primitivism, a precursor to exoticism though one that would be retained as we shall see. In France, it was Montaigne's description of cannibals (which was strongly

---

<sup>208</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 75.

<sup>209</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 264-265. Todorov has drawn a timeline of the development of exoticism in Western culture running from Homer, "the first famous 'exoticist'" (265), through to Pierre Loti and beyond. I have found this outline both economical and effective in describing the development of exoticism in the French literary tradition.



influenced by Vespucci's *Mundus Novus*) that most famously advanced the notion of primitivism in the early modern period. This "natural" humanity is described almost completely through comparison to the society of Montaigne and his contemporaries; the cannibals are chiefly represented in negative values: by what they are *not*. He uses these people, whom he considers superior in their naturalness, to critique his own culture, which has strayed from nature and become more artificial. However, it must be understood that the price of this naturalness is a complete lack of artificiality: there are many good things that come from a lack of law, government and religion, but these must be weighed against the negative implications of such simplicity, among which cannibalism is most pointedly invoked by Montaigne.<sup>210</sup>

This notion of the simultaneous nobility and primitiveness is most famously associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his "noble savage." In fact, this is something of an aberration, as Rousseau's "state of nature" was intended only as a Platonic ideal. If humankind did exist in such a state at some point in time, Rousseau was quite certain that it could never be replicated, and that though the arts and sciences may be a result of some degree of corruption, they are safeguards against even greater decay. Rousseau clearly refuses the primitivism inherent in earlier accounts of a Golden Age, and his actual meaning points to a paradox which Todorov has formulated: "society corrupts man, but man is truly man only because he has entered into society."<sup>211</sup> Yet, in spite of having made these distinctions, Rousseau would be famously misread by his young follower François-René de Chateaubriand.

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 265-269.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 277-280.

Chateaubriand, along with Constantin Chasse-beuf de Volney, and Alphonse de Lamartine, “set the tone for the French reflection on the Orient during the first half of the nineteenth-century.” In the pivotal works of these three writers, French Orientalism moved away from the fantastic exoticism of the eroticized Orient, “and the harem that had dominated eighteenth-century exoticism.”<sup>212</sup> In fact, they tended to argue against polygamy when they took notice of it at all. Chateaubriand in particular was hostile to the “Oriental other,” whom he always encountered as a “feminized” man, who represented “an irreconcilable conflict of values and beliefs rather than the irresistible attraction of opposites.”<sup>213</sup> This trend of representing the Orient through its architecture and landscapes, and reducing it to its men when people are represented at all, would be largely maintained during the first half of the nineteenth century among French travel writers on the Orient.<sup>214</sup> Among the writers of the first half of the century, it is certainly Chateaubriand who stands out as “the inventor of the voyage as it [would] come to be practiced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” The narratives generated by his voyages have served as prototypes for countless subsequent travel writers.<sup>215</sup>

Chateaubriand made two major voyages: to The West (America) in 1791, and to The East (Greece, Palestine and Egypt) in 1806-1807, which was published as *Itinéraire*

---

<sup>212</sup> Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 123. Their three pivotal works, each about a generation apart, were: Volney’s *Voyage to Egypt and Syria* (1787), Chateaubriand’s *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811), and Lamartine’s *Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages pendant un Voyage en Orient* (1835).

<sup>205</sup> Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, 124.

<sup>214</sup> Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, 123. Dobie contends that, contrary to Edward Said’s assertion that, “after 1800, virtually all Western travelers to the Orient were embarking on an erotic quest,” it was not until the second half of the century that “eroticized narratives really became prevalent” in France.

<sup>215</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 282.

*de Paris à Jérusalem*. The “Indians” of the West were natural and their culture maintained its vigor because they had no written history, but this also meant that it risked disappearance. The East was culturally rich, inhabited by peoples with histories, civilizations, sciences and arts.<sup>216</sup> His first voyage, to America, was a quest to find humanity living in Rousseau’s “state of nature.” In the course of his travels, Chateaubriand reached the conclusion that it was the cultivation of the mind and the application of knowledge which mattered in the development of man, and not the expression of his “natural” leanings. In so doing, he positioned himself in opposition to the primitivism of Columbus, Vespucci, Montaigne, and (he believed) Rousseau, to become the first exoticist *de rigueur* of the modern period.<sup>217</sup> During Chateaubriand’s second voyage, he formed the hypothesis that, while the Americans were “savage” because they had not yet attained a state of civilization, the Arabs had reached a state of civilization from which they had then declined to the point of savagery. Naturally, it was the French who occupied the middle station as the currently civilized people.<sup>218</sup>

The universalism that Chateaubriand had inherited from Rousseau was easily tainted by Chateaubriand’s ethnocentrism, which made all people but the French less civilized, and thus less human by degrees. Further, in the work gleaned from his second voyage, he consciously set out to write a travel narrative which remained true to his own experiences, and which did not claim to be particularly faithful to the people and places which it described – an egocentric universalism which ignored the thoughts, feelings, and

---

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 283-284.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 282-286.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 300.

even the very existence of all other people as much as possible. In so doing, he introduced the “modern tourist” to the field of travel writing:<sup>219</sup>

...j’ai déclaré que je n’avais aucune prétention, ni comme savant, ni même comme voyageur. Mon *Itinéraire* est la course rapide d’un homme qui va voir le ciel, la terre et l’eau, et qui revient à ses foyers avec quelques images nouvelles dans la tête, et quelques sentiments de plus dans le cœur...

[...I declared that I had not a single pretension, neither as a savant, nor even as a traveler. My *Itinéraire* is the hurried trail of a man who has gone to see the sky, the earth and water, and who returns to his hearth with some new images in his head, and some further sentiments in his heart...] <sup>220</sup>

Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) would come to be known as the first important French artist of the second half of the nineteenth century “to question whether the inner experience of man, especially states of dream and daydream, were not equally important ways of access to universal truths.”<sup>221</sup> Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient* (1851) appeared forty years after Chateaubriand’s *Itinéraire*. It is a travel narrative in which he buys Zeynab, a Javanese woman, in Cairo’s slave market. In it, Nerval did build on the foundations of earlier works including those of Chateaubriand, though he also departed from them in several important ways. Nerval moved further inward, replacing the illustrious descriptive passages favored by Chateaubriand with more personal reminiscences. This can in part be explained by Nerval’s relative openness to Islam and the culture of the Orient, which allowed him to explore the social and cultural landscape instead of dismissing it out of hand, while it also “had the effect of foregrounding the Western gaze that is all but erased in the picturesque style of his predecessors.”<sup>222</sup> In addition to promoting a closer inspection of reality, Nerval’s work also validated “intermediate states

---

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 300-304.

<sup>220</sup> M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem, suivi des voyages en Amérique, en France, en Italie. Tome premier* (Paris: Krabbe, 1848), 41ff.

<sup>221</sup> Robinson, *French Literature*, 126.

<sup>222</sup> Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, 125.

of consciousness,” such as those reached by using hashish and opium, as sorts of dreams containing important truths about human existence.<sup>223</sup>

As the purchase of Zeynab would suggest, women are central to Nerval’s narrative, and, in a departure from the extensive descriptions of the physical environment in the works of earlier nineteenth century writers, Nerval delivers a tale that is driven by “narrative, dialogue and self-dramatization.”<sup>224</sup> Another important departure from the work of Chateaubriand and Lamartine, which was equally in opposition to their shared Catholic conservatism, was the absence of a spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Nerval’s narrative; he slyly blames this absence of a Catholic focus on the cost of purchasing Zeynab, though it is much more readily explained by his tendency toward liberalism.<sup>225</sup> In the years immediately following the publication of the many volumes of the *Description de l’Égypte* – the mammoth scholarly undertaking connected with Napoleon’s 1799-1801 misadventure which began to be published 1810 – commentators tended to portray colonial expansion as a military conquest. This bellicose rendering was often softened to an allegorical “spiritual or erotic union,” wherein African and Asian territories are women and European powers are men. Nerval’s is among the most important works that introduced this allegorical “sexualization of colonial discourse” to exotic literature, establishing a metaphorical language of miscegenation.<sup>226</sup> The most

---

<sup>223</sup> Robinson, *French Literature*, 127.

<sup>224</sup> Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, 124-125.

<sup>225</sup> Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, 126. “Until the 1870s, when colonialism became an official policy that enjoyed government support, it was, like nationalism, primarily the province of the left-wing opposition.” (134)

<sup>226</sup> Dobie, *Foreign Bodies*, 129.

popular French literary voice to inherit this language in the early decades of the Third Republic would be that of Pierre Loti.<sup>227</sup>

#### 4.2 Pierre Loti and the Colonial Expansion of the Third Republic

Exoticism in the hands of Pierre Loti was an extension of the “egocentric voyage” Chateaubriand had begun recording in the early nineteenth century, though it also followed very much in the erotic tradition of Nerval. Loti’s writing was generally focused on two characters: Loti and Loti’s sensations, which he collects as he obeys his desires. Though, on the surface of his works, Loti seemed to tend toward the opposite pole – he learned the languages and customs of the peoples he visited – the “dignity of subject” was given only to the narrator himself, or his French protagonists.<sup>228</sup> This ethnocentrism and egocentrism is very much a reflection of Loti’s racialism. Whereas Chateaubriand, in theory, stuck by the racial monogenesis championed by Rousseau, Loti was unencumbered by such a belief; like many prominent thinkers of his generation, some of whom are discussed in the previous chapters, Loti denied the unity of the human race, and saw “insurmountable” barriers between the races, which he depicted as separate species.<sup>229</sup>

Loti’s best-known works all follow a pattern which underlines the impossible difference between races: a European man (usually Loti) visits a non-European country and has an erotic relationship with a local woman, often referred to as a marriage. The

---

<sup>227</sup> “Pierre Loti” was the pen name of the French naval officer Julien Viaud.

<sup>228</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 308-310.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

relationship between the man and the woman is generally representative of the relationship between the dominant, male nation (France), and the penetrated, female nation (Japan, Senegal, etc). The woman is left behind by the man, generally to suffer a shameful fate, or she dies, or they both die. But in any case, the woman is an object, and Loti takes what comes easily – what can be sensed – and discards the rest as incomprehensible or meaningless. Only the man is treated as a subject. The relationship is based on the man's physical attraction to the woman; her feelings on the matter are not generally consulted, and in any case she is usually being prostituted, though Loti shies away from such terminology.<sup>230</sup>

It is often stated that Loti was a champion of anti-colonial causes.<sup>231</sup> This is not exactly true. As Alex G. Hargreaves has demonstrated, Loti was scarcely aware of the political implications of colonialism, to the extent that, in much of his early writing “the colonies” simply implied a hazy grouping of “exotic foreign lands.”<sup>232</sup> Towards the end of his life, when writing in defense of the Turks as the Ottoman Empire was collapsing in 1913, he bluntly conceded that he knew nothing of the workings of European political and economic influences. Here as elsewhere throughout his work, Loti's opinions focused on his personal experience, in this instance his impression of Constantinople during a brief sojourn. As a writer (and one assumes as a thinker) he was unable or unwilling to attempt to see things from a perspective other than his own, much less speak

---

<sup>230</sup> Hargreaves, *The Colonial Experience*, 34; Todorov 1993, 314-315.

<sup>231</sup> For example: Ziad Fahmy, “Francophone Egyptian Nationalists, Anti-British Discourse, and European Public Opinion, 1885 – 1910: The Case of Mustafa Kamil and Ya‘qub Sannu” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 1 (2008), 178.

<sup>232</sup> Hargreaves, *The Colonial Experience*, 22-23.

out against colonial initiatives in the interests of native populations.<sup>233</sup> It was his love of the antiquated and his fear of change that went against colonization, and industrial development in general; he wrote a long narrative about a trip across India without mentioning the British once, not because he was concerned with the sovereignty of Indian populations, but because he did not want the “exotic” effect of the region spoiled.<sup>234</sup>

The people and cultures of the “Far East” were so drastically different from what Loti knew that he was forced, very much against his will, to acknowledge the predominance, and therefore the legitimacy, of the environment – both the places and the populations. The “yellow race” was, in his estimation, the form of human being furthest removed from Europeans.<sup>235</sup> This sentiment is apparent in his treatment of Japanese people and culture in *Madame Chrysanthème*, in which he describes his Japanese “wife” (whom he has purchased) as a typical example of her “ugly” race, a species so far removed from his own that he considered mutual empathy an impossibility.<sup>236</sup>

Loti’s greatest distaste, however, was reserved for Indochina, a distaste which was (then as now) interpreted as an anti-colonial attitude though they stem from much more personal reasons. A disease caught while serving as a naval surgeon in Indochina had killed Loti’s older brother in 1865, and this had deeply affected Loti. Loti’s work on Indochina included a series of three columns written for *Le Figaro*, and published on

---

<sup>233</sup> Hargreaves, *The Colonial Experience*, 21-26. He enjoyed his brief stay on the Indian island of Mahé, which he visited on his return voyage from Indochina in 1883, because it reminded him of childhood summers in southwestern France. The signs of local, island culture annoyed him because they distracted him from his reminiscence.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid 30-31.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 27-29

<sup>236</sup> Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 314-321. One indicator of this supposed racial inferiority which Loti mentions, is the willingness with which Chrysanthème’s parents sell her to Loti; that Loti has also agreed to buy her, however, indicates nothing more than his desire to ‘play house.’



September 28<sup>th</sup>, October 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 1883, about the French “pacification” of Tonkin. In it he gave a detailed, episodic, and often gruesome firsthand account of the landing of French troops near Hue, and the ensuing slaughter of hundreds of poorly armed Vietnamese that took place toward the end of August 1883. The following is a typically shocking excerpt from the column for October 13<sup>th</sup>, which, along with the final column, was published under the heading “Au Tonkin.” The events being related took place on the night of August 20<sup>th</sup>:

Quelques-uns s’étaient enfuis vers le Nord, laissant tomber leurs provisions, leurs petits paniers de riz, leurs chiques de bétel. Ceux qui avaient la poitrine crevée criaient d’une manière profonde et horrible, en vomissant leur sang dans le sable. Un, qui avait dans la bouche la baïonnette d’un matelot, mordait cette pointe, la serrait de toutes ses forces avec ses dents saignantes qui crissaient contre le fer, – pour l’empêcher d’*entrer*, de lui crever la gorge. Mais le matelot était fort, et ses dents s’étaient cassées; la pointe, sortie par la nuque, l’avait cloué dans le sable. On tuait presque gaiement, déjà grisé par les cris, par la course, par la couleur de sang.

[Some of them took off to the North, letting fall their provisions, their little baskets of rice, their quid of betel. Those which had their chests torn open were screaming in a deep and horrible fashion, vomiting their blood into the sand. One who had in his mouth a sailor’s bayonet, bit the tip, straining with all his might with his bloody teeth which screeched against the iron, – to stop it from *entering*, from puncturing his throat. But the sailor was strong, and his teeth were shattered; the tip, exiting through the nape, pinned him in the sand. We killed almost gaily, already intoxicated by the screams, by the chase, by the color of blood.]

At various points, Loti compared the Vietnamese soldiers to women, chiefly because of their long hair and the way it was worn, suggesting, as in this passage from October 17<sup>th</sup>, the prevalent opinion that the Vietnamese were androgynous in appearance.<sup>237</sup>

On-en voyait d’absolument fous, qui se relevaient, pris d’un vertige de courir, comme des bêtes blessées; ils faisaient en zigzags, et tout de travers, cette course de la mort, se retroussant jusqu’aux reins d’une manière comique; leurs chignons

---

<sup>237</sup> Proschan, “EUNUCH MANDARINS,” 436; Yee, *Clichés*, 192-196; Yee, “‘L’Indochine androgyne,’” 269-282.

dénoués, leurs grands cheveux leur donnant des airs de femme. [We saw some who were completely crazy, who picked themselves up, seized by dizziness from running, like a wounded animal; they made zigzags, and ran in all directions, that race of death, hiking their pants up high in a comical manner; with their buns undone, their big hair giving them the appearance of women.

In the column of October 17<sup>th</sup>, at the end of the fighting, the French marines are reduced to bayoneting the wounded and hiding Vietnamese soldiers, who are ferreted out by “boys” from Saigon.<sup>238</sup>

Des petits « boys » de Saïgon, efféminés et féroces – domestiques annamites venus à la suite de l’infanterie – s’étaient répandus parmi les matelots, les appelaient quand ils avaient déniché quelque malheureux caché dans un coin, les tiraient par le bras, disant : « Monsieur, encore un par ici, encore un par là !... Viens vite, monsieur, lui faire pan, pan, pan ! » [Some little “boys” from Saigon, effeminate and ferocious – Annamite domestics who followed the infantry – were scattered amongst the marines, calling to them when they had uncovered some unfortunate hidden in a corner, pulling them by the arm, saying: “Mister, another one over here, another one over there! Come quick, mister, give him boom, boom, boom!”]

This alarming combination of effeminacy and ferocity, childishness and mercilessness that Loti identifies in the Vietnamese “boys” who are corrupting the French marines characterizes the only meaningful relationship between the French and the Vietnamese which is described in his columns for *Le Figaro*. Loti makes it clear that it is the influence of the “Annamite race” which has made the French marines into dishonorable murderers: “On les reconnaissait plus, les matelots; ils étaient fous [They were no longer recognizable, the marines; they were mad].”

---

<sup>238</sup> Proschan, “EUNUCH MANDARINS,” 448-451, 464. The French adopted the English “boy” to refer to male domestic servants, and, as in English, the term did not necessarily refer to children. (448, 464) The boy was “an obligatory part of every colonial’s household,” (448) who was virtually always portrayed as “effeminized,” and who was generally viewed as “someone whose laziness was exceeded only by his craftiness, someone filthy and naturally inclined to thievery, gambling, drunkenness, and dishonesty.” (452)

### 4.3 Enter Bonnetain

Loti's columns raised a loud outcry from both the right and the left against the brutality committed by the marines, and would see him recalled to France by the Admiralty; an inquiry was commissioned by the Minister of the Marine in Ferry's cabinet, Vice-Admiral Peyron, into the veracity of Loti's accounts of French brutality during the landing. Both the reports which were requested by the inquiry, failed to corroborate Loti's accounts of brutality on the part of French marines. For his part, Loti had not intended to cause the stormy backlash against the Ferry government's policies of colonial expansion, but found himself used as a political pawn. Only Loti's powerful friends, among whom could be counted the prominent *revancharde* and senator's wife Juliette Adam and the popular novelist Alphonse Daudet (both of whom Loti approached about the matter), and his position as a much loved man of letters would soften the caution that he did receive.<sup>239</sup>

Not surprisingly, Loti was no longer willing to write for *Le Figaro*. In his place, they hired Bonnetain, a young and energetic writer who had recently made waves with his Naturalist novel *Charlot s'amuse*, published in January of 1883.<sup>240</sup> Bonnetain left France on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1884, and arrived in Hanoi during the first days of February.<sup>241</sup> He would spend several grueling months marching with French infantry, an exercise which

---

<sup>239</sup> Magali Lacousse, "Pierre Loti Marin", in *Loti en son temps: Colloque de Paimpol* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1994) 189-196.

<sup>240</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 8.

<sup>241</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 16-17.

would prove both difficult and unrewarding: Bonnetain would miss any serious military action, much to the dismay of both himself and his readers.<sup>242</sup>

One evening, after a good deal of drinking during an overnight stay in Hanoi, Bonnetain asked jokingly if the scheduled execution of some “pirates” could be moved ahead several days so that he might see some gore to report in his column. His drunken wish was granted, and he was roused early to witness the beheadings he had asked to see. In the following passage, Bonnetain realizes that the youngest of the three pirates is begging him for his life; though he does not use his authority to stay the execution, Bonnetain is understandably haunted by the fact that he has witnessed the execution “d’un être pareil à moi [of a being the same as I]” at his own behest.<sup>243</sup>

Cet homme me demandait grâce! Moi blanc, moi Français, je pouvais le sauver, et il m’implorait avec des sanglots rauques qui faisaient danser la cangue autour de son cou. Son visage convulsé avait comme perdu ses traits, inexpressif, mort déjà, et toute la vie de cet être, une furieuse vie décuplée de révolte s’était réfugiée dans ses yeux. Pareils à deux billes d’émail, ils jaillissaient, énormes, des orbites, avec une pupille effroyablement élargie dont l’atroce mobilité promenait sans repos sur la foule, sur moi, sur les choses, sa supplication instinctive et son tragique épouvantement. La face n’avait plus de couleur fixe. Sa peau jaune, ne pouvant pâlir, avait verdi, puis, des teintes bilieusement bistres avaient éteint ce vert, et promené, des temps au menton, une bigarrure horrible, délayage des tons des noyés à la Morgue [This man was asking me to spare his life! Being white, being French, I could save him, and he implored me with racking sobs that made the cangue dance around his neck. His convulsed face was as though it had lost its character, expressionless, already dead, and all the life of this being, a furious life fueled by revolt was contained in his eyes. Like two beads of enamel, they shimmered, enormous, eye sockets, with dreadfully enlarged pupils the atrocious movement of which travelled without pause about the crowd, over me, over things, its instinctive supplication and its tragic dreadfulness. His face no longer had a fixed color. His yellow skin, unable to pale, had become greenish, nauseously grayish tones had overwhelmed this green, and travelled, by stages across the chin, a horrible mottle, a blend of the tones of the drowned bodies at the Morgue]...<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 194.

<sup>243</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 143.

<sup>244</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 148.

This passage is followed by a gory and sensational rendering of the beheadings of the three pirates performed by Vietnamese executioners. That night, Bonnetain is awakened by nightmares, which cause him to wash his hands again and again.<sup>245</sup> This sickening scene – one of a very few violent passages in Bonnetain’s reporting – quite clearly has none of the bloodthirstiness or military nonchalance of Loti’s columns. This absence of martial enthusiasm can in part be attributed to the markedly different situations in which Loti and Bonnetain found themselves – Loti in the thrill of combat and Bonnetain at an execution – though, from the virtual absence of French casualties in Loti’s account, perhaps their situations were not so different. In any case, it is clear that Bonnetain’s account has broken the comfortable divide between the exotic and the known. He has seen fear and suffering in a “being” that is “the same” as himself. Loti, who speaks of the Vietnamese as an inscrutable, animalistic “race,” is much more concerned about the effect that the horrors of the French landing will have on the marines who slaughtered the poorly equipped Vietnamese.

As Yee has intimated, the work of Naturalist colonial authors like Bonnetain is a departure from Loti for two reasons: Bonnetain is an avowed disciple of Zola, a Naturalist, and Bonnetain explains his racial determinism much more fully. We have already witnessed in the previous chapter the allegiance that Bonnetain had to Zola, and the seriousness, or at least the studiousness, with which he produced literature “scientifically.” In the work of Loti, especially with regards to Vietnam, racialism is more a vague smattering of attributes, largely zoological, that allude to science without ever

---

<sup>245</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 155-56.

attempting to assert it as an authority. Consider the following passage from “Corvée matinale,” a piece Loti wrote for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1884:

Qui nous appelle, avec ce geste gracieux d’éventail ? Un homme ou une femme ? Dans ce pays-ci, on ne sait jamais : même costume, même chignon, même laideur...

Mais non ! c’est *monsieur Hoé*, personnage de genre ambigu, [...] une soutane de prêtre, une figure de singe, le nœud du chignon très haut, et coiffé en mouchoir par là-dessus, comme un vieux pour se mettre au lit. [Who is calling us, with this gracious fanning gesture? A man or a woman? In this country, you never know: same suit, same bun, same ugliness...

But no! it’s *mister Hoé*, a character of ambiguous gender, [...] a priest’s cassock, the face of a monkey, the knot of the bun tied very high, and styled with a hanky on top, like an old man who is ready to get into bed.]<sup>246</sup>

Monsieur Hoé is a person “de genre ambigu,” which means, in this instance, of ambiguous gender, but beyond this Loti’s comments on the racial characteristics of the man are simplistic comparisons: he has the face of a monkey, is dressed as a priest, and he is ugly. His ugliness is not described further. The following is Bonnetain’s description of two rowers his protagonist encounters in *L’Opium*:

Le jeune homme alors compta ses malles sous la voûte de bambou tressé recouvrant une fausse cale au centre de la barque, et rien ne lui manquant, s’assit à l’avant près des nageurs, qui promenaient, à contre mesure, de longs avirons. Leur élan se coupait de flexions alternatives des jambes, avec des pointes de danseuses sur leurs orteils très écartés. Ils tournaient le dos au voyageur qu’intéressa leur cassure de petits pantins. Lorsqu’ils se penchaient, leur blouse fendue latéralement collait à leur corps, se plaquait sur leur déhanchement, soulignait leur ensellure professionnelle de mariniers d’Indo-Chine, toujours nageant debout. Ils avaient, l’un et l’autre, un chignon sous leur salaco, et de larges pantalons s’arrêtant au genou sur des jambes grêles. Aussi, la cotonnade brune et sale de leurs hardes, après les premières répugnances, arrêta-t-elle Marcel pour les lignes qu’elle recouvrait, fuyantes lignes, d’une finesse presque élégante, qui parlaient d’hermaphrodites. Et il douta de leur sexe [The Young man then counted his trunks under the vault of thatched bamboo which covered a false hold in the center of the barque, and as nothing was missing, sat himself at the front near the rowers, who plied their long oars in syncopation. Their momentum was broken by the opposing sway of their legs, with the points of dancers on their

---

<sup>246</sup> Pierre Loti, *Pierre Loti de l’Académie française: Nouvelles et récits*, ed. Guy Dugas & Alain Quella-Villéger (Paris: Omnibus, 2000), 167.

widely splayed toes. They turned their backs on the passenger who showed an interest in their jerky puppet movements. When they bent, their blouses which hung laterally clung to their bodies, clung to their swaying hips, underlined the spinal curvature typical of Indochinese mariners, always rowing on their feet. They all had a bun under their headscarves, and wide pants which ended at the knee on spindly legs. Also, the dirty brown cotton of their rags, after the initial repugnance, gave Marcel pause for the lines which they covered, elusive lines, of an almost elegant finesse, which spoke of hermaphrodites. And he had doubts about their sex].<sup>247</sup>

When Marcel inquires, the amused pair tell him that they are brother and sister.

This passage is typical of Bonnetain's descriptions of the Vietnamese in that it describes the supposed androgyny of the Vietnamese in scientific terms – "hermaphrodites" – and in its rich descriptiveness of their "elusive lines." It is also typical in that it stresses the balance between "répugnances" and curiosity, which is standard in Bonnetain's assessment of the Vietnamese. For Loti, his distaste is unequivocal: "je n'aimerai jamais ce pays, ni aucune créature de cette triste race jaune. C'est bien la vraie terre d'exil, celle-ci, où rien ne me retient ni ne me charme [I will never like this country, nor any creature of this sad yellow race. It is truly a land of exile, this one, where nothing grips me nor charms me]."<sup>248</sup> This underlines perhaps the most important difference between Bonnetain and Loti with regards to Vietnam: whereas Loti is only tacitly supportive of colonialism in Vietnam in the way that he depicts colonial populations as inferior and animalistic, but outwardly opposed to it for the damage which it will inflict on the French, Bonnetain is openly supportive of colonialism for the same reason – the racial inferiority of the Vietnamese – but he is also concerned for the well-being of the French in Vietnam. Thus, while both men agree that the Vietnamese are androgynous and inferior, Loti sees only a "sad yellow race" in a hellish place, while Bonnetain sees a race

---

<sup>247</sup> Bonnetain, *L'Opium*, 151.

<sup>248</sup> Loti, *Pierre Loti de l'Académie française*, 186-187.

that is destined to disappear without the addition of noble French blood, and a country that can be rich with French intervention.<sup>249</sup> It is this inconsistency in attitudes which marks Bonnetain as an important pioneer in the emergence of the pro-colonial perspective in French literature of the Third Republic.

On the next page, after he has described M. Hoé, Loti describes some “dames jaunes [yellow ladies]” who also share this “grande laideur [great ugliness]” with Monsieur Hoé, though Loti recognizes them as prostitutes. He bemoans their great ugliness, and compares their long hair to the tails of horses; one of his subordinate sailors tells them that they would have better luck mating with macaques. But again, this ugliness is not qualified with any physical description that could be called properly racial; only their teeth, stained by betel, are mentioned.<sup>250</sup> The seventh chapter of *Au Tonkin* is titled “L’Opium,” and in it Bonnetain meets a young French opium addict with his female companion, a Vietnamese woman:

Silencieusement alors, j’examinai la femme. Une Annamite, elle ; non pas toutefois la femelle vulgaire, rencontrée jusque-là. Celle-ci devait appartenir à la classe riche, ou bien c’était une opulente courtisane. De lourds bracelets, un gros collier d’argent sonnaient à ses poignets et à son cou ; des bagues ceignaient ses doigts d’enfant plats du bout et relevés, terminés par des ongles immenses. La face reproduisait le masque habituel des femmes du peuple, avec des détails plus fins et des méplats moins accusés. L’œil étroit et long vivait seul sur cette face plate de poupée. Sous le nez camus, la bouche ouvrait son pur dessin, et les lèvres sanglantes laissaient voir les dents petites, artificiellement noircies, repoussantes sous leur laque humide. La peau tendue aux tempes semblait lustrée.... Or, cette femme était jolie, jolie de la beauté asiatique, hiératique un peu, et qui tout d’abord trouble l’imagination seule. Après le premier éclair, son regard redevenait limpide, glacé, sans un rêve. Elle se laissa étudier étrangement indifférente, et je suivis, guettant l’ombre d’une gêne, la ligne souple de son corps, depuis le cou mal attaché, depuis la poitrine que les seins petits, classiquement hémisphériques, renflait trop bas, jusqu’aux hanches accusées à peine. Accroupie sur ses talons, dans la pose orientale, elle ressemblait à une

---

<sup>249</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 193-240.

<sup>250</sup> Loti, *Pierre Loti de l’Académie française*, 168.



divinité bouddhique. Ses pieds jaunes, ses chevilles grosses passaient, de chaque côté, sous les plis de ses robes de soie [Silently then, I examined the woman. An Annamite, she; not altogether the vulgar female, encountered until then. This one must belong to the rich class, or else it was an opulent courtesan. Heavy bracelets, a large silver necklace jangled at her wrists and at her neck; rings encircled her child's fingers which were flat on the end and turned up, and ending in immense nails. The face reproduced the habitual mask of the women of the people, with finer details and a less severe flatness. The long strait eye was the only liveliness on this flat dolls face. Under the pug nose, the mouth opened its pure outline, and the glistening red lips let me see the little teeth, artificially blackened, repulsive under their glistening laquer. The tight skin at the temples seemed to glisten... Now, this woman was pretty, pretty with an Asian beauty, having something of the priestess, and which therefore is troubling only to the imagination. After the initial vivacity, her look remained limpid, glassed over, without a dream. She allowed herself to be studied with strange indifference, and I followed, keeping an eye out for any hint of embarrassment, the supple line of her body, from the oddly attached neck, from the chest which the little breasts, classically hemispherical, bulged too low, to the barely discernable hips. Crouching on her heels, in the Oriental pose, she resembled a Buddhist divinity. Her yellow feet, her fat ankles passed, on either side, under the folds of her silk robes].<sup>251</sup>

Not only is Bonnetain's description of the "courtesan" much more detailed and much more flattering than Loti's description of the prostitutes whom he and his friends taunt, but Bonnetain also makes one other vital inclusion in his description: the woman is the doll-like companion of a French man. Much as is the case with his depictions of race, Loti's understanding of the damage which the French could suffer through contact with the Vietnamese is superficial – primarily he concentrates on the horrors of war; as he refuses to invest even his usual, lecherous interest in the Vietnamese, there is not much else to say. At various points Bonnetain's assessment of the situation delves into the dangers inherent in cohabitation with a member of such a degenerate race, and his novel *L'Opium* would illustrate the dangers of "encongaïement," not least of which was opium

---

<sup>251</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 132-133.

itself.<sup>252</sup> In the *fin-de-siècle* discourse, beauty and intelligence went together as did ugliness and animal brutality; to recognize beauty was to recognize intelligence, and it represented the beginnings of respect for the “Other.”<sup>253</sup> Though Bonnetain would recognize beauty in the Vietnamese, it was the nature of this beauty that would present a danger to French men in Tonkin.

#### 4.4 Gendered Confusion and Lamarckian Condemnation

The differences between *Au Tonkin* and *L’Opium* are, not surprisingly, numerous. One is a work of journalism, the other a novel, and they tend to differ accordingly, but, thanks to Bonnetain’s Naturalist approach, both works impart a well-defined, fatalistic account of the interaction between the French and the Vietnamese. The description of this interaction in *L’Opium*, however, is much more detailed, and there is imparted over the course of the novel a skepticism about the parts which both the French and the Vietnamese will play in the civilizing mission framed by Ferry. A good portion of this skepticism stems from the much more detailed descriptions of the trappings of *encongaïement* that are included in *L’Opium*.

It is in the seventh chapter of *Au Tonkin* that Bonnetain first encounters the Indochinese example of two mainstays of the French colonial novel, both of which will figure largely in *L’Opium*: the native woman and the male French protagonist. The

---

<sup>252</sup> “Encongaïement” referred to the practice of taking on a “congaï” as an accessory to life in Indochina. Proschan notes that while the term “congaï” simply denoted a young woman in Vietnamese, “in the French discourse it shifts semantically from ‘woman’ to ‘wife’ to ‘concubine’ to ‘whore,’ ultimately accomplishing the degradation of all womanhood.” (Proschan, “EUNUCH MANDARINS,” 456.)

<sup>253</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 80-83. The *Larousse Dictionnaire Universel* of 1875 affirmed in its entry for “race,” that the shape of the head and the face were indicators of intelligence, as well as racial characteristics.

relationship between the two is an allegorical representation of the relationship between the penetrated female colony and the conquering male colonizer, a relationship which was familiar to exoticism, as we have seen; the relationship inevitably ends in the woman somehow failing the man, resulting in his breaking with her and her precipitous demise, or in her influence eroding his civilized tendencies as he succumbs to *encongaïement*. In this way the woman represents both the danger and the attraction of the colony.<sup>254</sup> The Naturalist colonial novel would thus be both scientific, in keeping with Zola's ideas, and male in its outlook. In this way, the above passage typifies Bonnetain's take on the Vietnamese woman: she is potentially attractive, and, with her small breasts and almost imperceptible hips, she is barely recognizable as a woman; herein lies perhaps the greatest danger to the male French colonizer: both the male and the female "Annamite" are potentially attractive, and both are used as a metonymy of the penetrated colony in Bonnetain's work, as they would be by authors of colonial novels after him.<sup>255</sup>

The supposed lack of sexual dimorphism among the Vietnamese also fit well into the science of degeneration; here again we see the insecurities and problems of France reflected in the assessment of colonial populations. The extremely slow rate of population growth in France between the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the outbreak of the

---

<sup>254</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 13-14.

<sup>255</sup> Proschan, "EUNUCH MANDARINS"; Yee, *Clichés*, 14, 192-196; Yee, "'L'Indochine androgyne'." Both authors offer an interesting take on the French construction of Vietnamese gender in literary examples beginning with Bonnetain. Yee has identified (192) three "essential aspects" to this well-documented belief: first, that homosexuality is a typically Asian "vice"; second, that the Vietnamese have a physique of ambiguous gender; third, that Indochina itself is an ambiguous place, between two dominant cultures (India and China). While Bonnetain certainly supports the second and third assertions, nowhere does he overtly state that the Vietnamese are homosexual, though as we shall see, their effeminacy would have been indication enough for much of his contemporary readership.

First World War was a matter of great concern among French commentators during the period.<sup>256</sup> This was known to be a failing in the rate of “marital fertility” rather than the rate of marriage, and in addition a drop in the number of male births was also noted; both these trends were blamed on the failing maleness of French men. This failure was due, in part, to the prevalence of neo-Lamarckian views that saw heredity as a force that waned with the energy of the male organism itself.<sup>257</sup> The idea that “sexual” cells were distinct from the other cells of the human body because they were the only cells that were “independent carriers of hereditary information,” was accepted “virtually everywhere after 1900 except in France.” This neo-Lamarckian line of reasoning would lead French scientists to continue experimenting with the embryos of various animals to “see if they could influence the rate or outcome of the developmental process or the sex ratios of new organisms.”<sup>258</sup> In the grand scope of things, this meant that “an organism’s sexual identity pervaded its entire being”.<sup>259</sup> Robert A. Nye refers to a “popular French text on sexual virility published in 1971,” which advised that women seeking lovers should be aware that, “the hand was a reliable indicator of the size and shape of the penis, and a weak handshake was a dead giveaway of impotence.”<sup>260</sup> Having considered Bonnetain’s thorough obsession with degeneration, and his knowledge of the work of Charcot as expressed in *Charlot s’amuse*, we must also consider the influence of Charcot’s theories upon Bonnetain’s understanding of the Vietnamese. Though Freud studied under Charcot

---

<sup>256</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 77-78. Between 1872 and 1911, the French population grew by only 10%, while Germany grew by 58%, Italy by 30%, Austria-Hungary by 38%, Great Britain by 43%, and European Russia by 78%.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 78-84.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 3.

in 1885-1886, his work on sexual “aberrations” would not cite any French works. This is a reflection of a break between French, and British and German sexology: the relative tolerance for sexual “variations” in German and British circles (notably with Freud) was closely linked to efforts to abolish harsh proscriptive laws against homosexuality, laws that were absent from the Napoleonic Code. The absence of such laws had the effect of allowing for “no medically-led homosexual rights agitation in France until after 1945,” despite such agitation in Britain and Germany even in the nineteenth century.<sup>261</sup> In keeping with their theme of masturbation, it was the conclusion of Charcot and Magnan, in a paper published in 1882, that ‘the solitary vice’ was often responsible for weakening the “natural,” heterosexual drive, resulting in the “inversion” of sexual appetites.<sup>262</sup> In *L’Opium*, Bonnetain identifies opium as a form of mental masturbation, which, in the case of the protagonist Marcel, can be interpreted as being coupled with homosexual tendencies.

French theories on the evolution of reproduction maintained that reproduction had evolved “from simple fission to hermaphroditic varieties of self-fertilization, concluding with sexual reproduction, where the males and the females of the species were separate beings characterized by a high degree of sexual dimorphism.”<sup>263</sup> It stood to reason, therefore that “ascendant evolution was promoted by increasing differentiation.”<sup>264</sup> The French understanding of the science of reproduction saw sexual dimorphism as the “trigger” for the natural reproductive instinct. As a result, a species (or race) could gain a

---

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 100-107.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 87. This was, in part, influenced by the thinking of Herbert Spencer, which stressed that evolution had progressed in species from “homogeneity to heterogeneity.”

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 88.

reproductive and evolutionary advantage with more pronounced sex differences, “because it would breed more effectively and prolifically.”<sup>265</sup> The French population problem piqued interest in the topic of reproductive health, and Robert A. Nye has argued effectively that the idea of sexual identity as a medical and pathological concept was a more prominent and developed idea in France than in other European nations during the fin-de-siècle period. As Frank Proschan has demonstrated, there was among French commentators of the fin-de-siècle “a scientific consensus” that those of higher race and class were more sexually differentiated.<sup>266</sup> More important to our discussion of Bonnetain’s work on Tonkin, Lamarckian thoughts regarding species adaptation encouraged thinking which saw undesirable physical qualities as symptomatic *and* consequential of behavioral pathologies.<sup>267</sup> In the context of French thoughts regarding the Vietnamese, this meant that it could be presumed that Vietnamese boys and men were homosexual or bisexual because they appeared androgynous, and that they appeared androgynous because they were homosexual. For the French in Vietnam, this meant that the confusing androgyny of the Vietnamese, “impelled otherwise innocent Frenchmen to pederasty,” and this moral failure would, in turn, translate into a degeneration with implications for heredity.<sup>268</sup>

Nowhere does Bonnetain openly refer to homosexual relationships between the French and the Vietnamese, which is not surprising given the legal battle he fought after *Charlot s’amuse*. A number of other Naturalist authors were taken to court over giving

---

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>266</sup> Proschan, “EUNUCH MANDARINS,” 442-443.

<sup>267</sup> Nye, *Masculinity*, 109. For example, pederasts were said to have penises that resembled dog penises.

<sup>268</sup> Proschan, “EUNUCH MANDARINS,” 438.

offence to morality, both before and after Bonnetain's day in court, and several were not so lucky as he had been.<sup>269</sup> However, the following description of the Vietnamese "girl" whom Marcel purchases from her parents to serve as his "congaï" can be read as the description of an adolescent boy, or alternately as a hermaphrodite:<sup>270</sup>

Nue dans le bain où il lui enseignait l'usage du savon, Thi-ba montrait une exquise gracilité de statuette Renaissance, des lignes fluides, la morbidesse insexuelle d'un joli sphinx. Sur sa plate poitrine de garçonnet gras, ses seins au bout d'un timide ovale d'une fraîcheur de fruit, dardaient une brune fleurette largement auréolée déjà de perles roses. Le cou souple et rond était bien d'une petite femme, se renflant quand elle parlait vite, mettant alors deux fossettes à la place des clavicules noyées un peu d'emphysème. Le corps était maigre sans maigreur, le bassin étroit, les hanches hésitantes, mais rien était charmant comme son dos puéril, comme ses bras de poupée, comme ses cuisses nerveuses sous la naissante caresse des contours. Consolant des pieds gâtés par les sandales, ses mains étaient fluettes. Toute cette chair d'apparence impubère se colorait enfin d'un jaune pâli, tendre, inrendu par l'Occident [Naked in the bath where he was teaching her to use soap, Thi-ba revealed a slender grace like that of a Renaissance figurine, fluid lines, the asexual perversity of a pretty sphinx. On her flat chest like that of a small, plump boy, her breasts at the end of a timid oval with the freshness of fruit, jutted out with a little brown flower largely haloed already by pink pearls. The supple and rounded neck was very much that of a little woman, bulging when she spoke quickly, leaving two dimples in place of her collarbones, which were somewhat, obscured by emphysema. The body was thin without thinness, the pelvis straight, the hips undecided, but nothing was as charming as her childish back, as her doll's arms, as her nervous thighs in the budding curves of their contours. While consoling her feet which were ruined by sandals, her hands appeared slight. All of this apparently prepubescent flesh was at bottom colored a pale yellow, tender, unspoiled by the Occident].<sup>271</sup>

It seems clear in any case, that the above description of Thi-ba is meant to leave no doubt in the reader's mind that the child's body is, with its male and female parts, of

---

<sup>269</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 171-172. Louis Desprez died from poor health exacerbated by a month spent in prison; Paul Adam was "ruined" by a heavy fine, and Descaves was "stripped of his military rank."

<sup>270</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 305. In the text leading to his quoting the above passage, Greaves made it clear that he read it as an indication that Bonnetain's protagonist, Marcel, was "attracted by the equivocal charms of the androgyne."

<sup>271</sup> Bonnetain, *L'Opium*, 489.

indistinct sex. There is, however, an ironic awareness in Bonnetain's description of Thi-ba, that her "insexuelle" physiology is most closely related to the fact that she is an "enfant de quatorze ans [child of fourteen]," regardless of the supposed degeneracy of her race.<sup>272</sup> Nevertheless, Marcel is drawn to her body, and not her face, where her eyes are "vide d'intelligence [void of intelligence]."<sup>273</sup> As Jennifer Yee has observed, in the racist perspective of late nineteenth century French colonial literature, the head of the racial other is not the locus of intelligence, but rather the seat of his or her animalism.<sup>274</sup> In spite of this depiction of Thi-ba as being little better than an animal, however, when Marcel gets into bed with her and finds that she is crying he flees, "horri  s comme s'il e  t tent   de violer une enfant v  ritable [horrified as though he were tempted to violate a veritable child]."<sup>275</sup> As with his encounter with the condemned pirate in *Au Tonkin*, Bonnetain is unable to dismiss the humanity of individuals, though he can speak very unreservedly about people in groups – racial, national, and other classifications. It is tellingly Marcel's friend, Dr. Chalon, who advises him, after eight nights, to have his way with Thi-ba despite her protestations; the doctor justifies this course of action with the claim that eighty percent of European marriages are just as despicable, "avec la l  galit   de leur viol [with the legality of their rape]." It is not a very complex logical assertion that, if Thi-ba is to be treated as Dr. Chalon claims that eighty percent of French wives are treated, then she must be, in some capacity, their equal (though French wives were not bought and sold). The mere fact that Marcel is sexually attracted to her denotes a certain measure of acknowledgement that she resembles his ideal of beauty in some

---

<sup>272</sup> Bonnetain, *L'Opium*, 488.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

<sup>274</sup> Yee, *Clich  s*, 91.

<sup>275</sup> Bonnetain, *L'Opium*, 491.



degree.<sup>276</sup> Several chapters further on, Bonnetain acknowledges the humanizing nature of this sex appeal when Thi-ba bursts into laughter at the sight of a visiting friend of Marcel's, "ce rire de gamine chatouillé qu'ont, à certains moments, les femmes de tous pays, blanches, jaunes ou noire [that laugh of a tickled kid that, at certain moments, women of all countries have, white, yellow or black]."<sup>277</sup> A universal womanliness certainly indicates a certain degree of universal humanity.

After Marcel's consultation with the doctor, Bonnetain ends the chapter suggestively: "Ce soir-là, Thi-ba ne pleura plus [That night, Thi-ba cried no more]."<sup>278</sup> Here again we see Bonnetain leaving the assessment of popular medical opinion to the reader, as he had done in *Charlot s'amuse*: why Thi-ba has ceased crying is not directly related, though the hints which follow can suggest several possible lines of reasoning. The chapter following the purchase of Marcel's congai, opens with the summing up of the days immediately after his acquisition, saying that things were the same as they had been except for the slight distraction of "ce petit animal annamite [that little Annamite animal]," and the fact that Marcel's opium intake had increased; the increased consumption was due to Thi-ba, who would begin preparing his next pipe before he had finished the one he was smoking.<sup>279</sup> Here we are reminded of the "courtesan" described in the seventh chapter of *Au Tonkin*, who stays with the French opium addict, facilitating his addiction though she herself smokes only cigarettes. As for the development of their sexual encounters, Marcel's interest is almost entirely in his own drug-induced fantasies, opium having reduced the sex act to little more than masturbation:

---

<sup>276</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 75.

<sup>277</sup> Bonnetain, *L'Opium*, 528.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

En ce Tonkin, au contraire, avec cette pauvre Annamite, il puisait, dans le commun cynisme de sa veulerie, un motif à regrets. Rien n'atténuait la malpropreté de sa chute. Comme on prends des bains de boue, il se vautrerait par hygiène, par terreur de l'affre sans nom dont, la nuit, il payait l'unique joie de ses jours - l'unique ressort en même temps de sa vie : l'opium. Parfois il se comparait aux Charlots solitaires qu'on guérit de leur vice en les jetant aux bras des filles. Hélas ! son vice à lui ne se guérissait qu'à demi, et les caresses de Thi-ba lui procuraient le seul sommeil, impuissantes pour la consolation comme pour l'oubli. Avec elle, la sensualité changeait de nom. Oh ! quel regard de sphinx elle avait lorsqu'entre deux spasmes, il la surprenait !... Le mâle râlait, et elle ne rêvait même point, incapable de vibrer dans des bras occidentaux, les sens inertes, et fixant au ciel de la moustiquaire l'ombre serpentine d'un gecko courant au dessus ! Les premiers jours, il éteignait la lampe, ou fermait les yeux pour ne plus voir ; ensuite, avant de gagner son lit, il fumait tant et tant qu'une illusion pouvait, durant l'étreinte, métamorphoser le réel [In this Tonkin, to the contrary, with this poor Annamite, he was drawing, from the common cynicism of his wretchedness, a motif of regrets. Nothing would ease the indecency of his descent. As one takes a mud bath, he wallowed by way of hygiene, from dread of the nameless pang which, at night, he paid the sole joy of his existence: opium. Sometimes he would compare himself to the solitary Charlies which one cures of their vice by throwing them into the arms of women. Alas! His own vice was only half cured, and Thi-ba's caresses afforded him his only slumber, as powerless to comfort as it was to help him forget. With her, sensuality had a new name. Oh! What a sphinx-like look she had when between spasms, he caught her!... The male moaned, and still she did not even dream of it, incapable of emoting in Occidental arms, her senses inert, and fixed in the heavens of the mosquito netting on the serpentine shadow of a gecko running across the top! During the first days, he had put out the lamp, or closed his eyes so as not to see; then, before going to bed, he had smoked more and more until an illusion could, during the embrace, metamorphosize reality].<sup>280</sup>

At first glance, it appears as though Bonnetain is merely paying lip service to the idea that Thi-ba is not receptive to Marcel's lovemaking because she is "incapable of trembling in occidental arms," seemingly referring to the impossible separation between races which Loti had often espoused. On closer inspection, however, it seems just as plausible that Bonnetain is suggesting that her senses are "inert" because she is a fourteen year-old being repeatedly violated by a foreign man to whom her family has sold her. It is the "commun cynisme de sa veulerie [common cynicism of his spinelessness]" from

---

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 495.

which Marcel draws his conclusions, and still he can only bring himself to violate her when he is hallucinating from smoking opium. Marcel considers himself a sensitive poet at heart;<sup>281</sup> he is only able to treat Thi-ba as he does because she is a member of “sa race enfantine et simiesque, fermée même à l’art chinois pourtant plus proche [her childish and simian-like race, shuttered even to the Chinese art that was close at hand],” let alone the subtleties of French artistic sensibilities.<sup>282</sup> Still he is so distraught by her sobs that he is unable to rape her. While I would hasten to add that Bonnetain seems largely to support the racist theories that were popular in his day, and the attitudes that they engendered, it seems clear that he is uneasy with the dehumanization of beings that are so clearly human.

Invoking the “Charlots solitaires qu’on guérit de leur vice en les jetant aux bras des filles [solitary Charlots who are cured of their vice by throwing them into the arms of girls],” adds a further suggestion of fecundity to the equation, for Charlot’s final love affair in *Charlot s’amuse*, ends with the birth of his son, who floats down the sewer in which his father has drowned, as Baguley put it, “like a wretched naturalist Moses to perpetuate the fatal corruption.”<sup>283</sup> In keeping with this theme, Thi-ba has grown fatter and her breasts have grown larger when Marcel leaves her only a matter of months later, suggesting that this opiated Charlot may have procreated as well.<sup>284</sup> Finally, it seems clear that if Bonnetain felt that the manner and gait of the Vietnamese “spoke of hermaphrodites,” he was equally well aware that they were not, in fact, without a defined

---

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 494.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 496.

<sup>283</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 112.

<sup>284</sup> Bonnetain, *L’Opium*, 527, 529. This is the last time Thi-ba appears in the novel, and we are not told if in fact she is pregnant.

sex any more than any other population. What is perhaps most indicative of the uncertain nature of Bonnetain's views regarding race, is that he makes known Marcel's belief that relationships between French men and their *congaïs* are "inféconds concubinages [infertile concubinages]," and then recounts immediately afterward the existence of a woman who is half Vietnamese and half French, with whom Marcel had had sexual relations.<sup>285</sup> The relationship with Thi-ba is described in such a way that her sex is indeterminate, and this can be attributed to both her youth, and the supposedly advanced stage of the degeneration of her race. On an allegorical level, the relationship between Thi-ba and Marcel (the central French-Vietnamese relationship in the novel) follows very much the tradition of the male colonizer penetrating the female colony, but the gender of the colony is less certain in Tonkin, and Thi-ba is symbolic of this uncertainty. Thi-ba represents the perennial immaturity and hermaphroditism of the "large children" of this "bastard" race. However, despite the fact that "for the French colonist in Indochina the boy [looked] like a girl and the girl like a boy," Bonnetain does not shy away from a close treatment of the topic of children produced by unions between French men and Vietnamese women in *L'Opium*.<sup>286</sup> Clearly, for Bonnetain, a certain degree of fertility between the French and Vietnamese "races" existed.

#### 4.5 Métissage

---

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 495-496.

<sup>286</sup> Yee, "'L'Indochine androgyne'," 269. No one has made mention of Bonnetain's treatment of métissage in *L'Opium*, including Yee who has cited it more than most.

If producing children with Vietnamese women was the way in which Bonnetain thought the French could civilize the Vietnamese, then we must pay particular attention to his commentary on these children of mixed race. As we have seen, this idea – that a race could be regenerated with ‘new blood’ – was in keeping with the thinking of Renan and others, and, although it was proposed rather jocularly by Bonnetain, this line of reasoning holds true in *L’Opium* as well, where there is a character named Loulou, who is half French and half Vietnamese. Marcel’s first sexual interaction with a woman who is at all Vietnamese is with Loulou, and the incident is notable in that Loulou, unlike Thi-ba, is able to enjoy Marcel’s overtures.<sup>287</sup> Significantly, Loulou continues to draw Marcel in after he has purchased Thi-ba because of her European “blood,” an inheritance which gives her the “sens de créole [senses of a Creole],” and a sweeter tasting mouth. He stops seeing her because she becomes a favorite of the French men in the area after being abandoned by the man who owned her, and it is unsavory for Marcel to meet other French men during his erotic quests.<sup>288</sup> There is a sense here, as with the description of the interaction with the pirate and with Thi-ba, that Bonnetain is quite aware of the glaring lack of civilization in the actions of Marcel and the other French men. Yet, in spite of any such considerations, it seems clear that Bonnetain felt that the main benefit of the addition of French blood to the “Annamite race” was that it would provide more attractive congai for future generations of French men: “si nous imitions tous le père de Loulou, nos successeurs s’ennuieraient ici moins que nous autres [if we all imitate Loulou’s father, our successors will be less bored here than we are]!”<sup>289</sup> In this

---

<sup>287</sup> Bonnetain, *L’Opium*, 402.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 497.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 242.

formulation, the mission to civilize becomes merely a mission to create a more sexually desirable subject population.

#### 4.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, it has been my intention to show that, although Bonnetain took many cues from exoticism in general, and Loti in particular, his work on Vietnam was a departure from the work of those who preceded him in several important ways. Perhaps most important among these differences, was the fact that Bonnetain was openly supportive of the French mission to civilize in Vietnam – this is stressed throughout *Au Tonkin* and in *L'Opium*. While it can be said that Bonnetain's assessment of Vietnam and the Vietnamese was more charitable than Loti's, and that his recognition of the proliferation of children from mixed French and Vietnamese unions is a tacit recognition of the humanity of the Vietnamese, there can be no doubt that he shared the view of the Vietnamese as a degenerate and "inferior" race; Marcel played house with Thi-ba while it served his purpose, and this clearly denotes a higher level of empathy than that which Loti had with the Vietnamese, but he still treated her as an amusing object at best.

Throughout Bonnetain's work on Tonkin, though especially in *L'Opium*, there is an unmistakable sense of confusion surrounding the idea of the French civilizing the Vietnamese through racial regeneration. This implied confusion can be seen quite clearly when the problem of the Métis is recognized as being both an impossibility and an undeniable eventuality in *L'Opium*. In Loti's work filled with "marriages," only one child

is produced, and he is killed conveniently at a very young age.<sup>290</sup> This marks another important departure from the exoticism of Loti to the Naturalist colonial novel of Bonnetain: what the exoticist will choose to ignore in order to maintain the allure of the exotic, the Naturalist will explore in order to maintain the fatalistic and unflinching tone of his work. This is the genesis of Bonnetain's confusion: as an anti-clerical materialist he is drawn to polygenism, and thus the disunity of the human race. However, as a Radical with socialist sympathies he is drawn to the "union for life" which is best suited to monogenism and a belief in the fundamental unity of the human race, though it was instead an expression of republican universalism (as I mentioned earlier).

This recognition of both the falseness of the legend of "infertile concubinages" of Vietnamese women by French men, and the reality of children of mixed French and Vietnamese parentage, is further reinforced by the knowledge which the reader has that Marcel's opinions and ideologies are not necessarily those of Bonnetain. Much as Charlot's life is a sort of mock biographical record of Bonnetain's experiences with Charcot and degeneration, Marcel's experience is a direct lift from Bonnetain's experience in Tonkin during 1884 and 1885, with the exception that Bonnetain lived to tell the tale, whereas Marcel smoked himself to death. Indeed, many of the long sections taken over by letters between Marcel and his two main French love interests are direct reprints of letters written by Bonnetain and his lovers with little more than the names changed.<sup>291</sup>

---

<sup>290</sup> Yee, *Clichés*, 287. The lack of children produced in Loti's various love affairs was first noted by Victor Segalen.

<sup>291</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 176-183.

It seems clear that there are several levels of meaning at work in *L'Opium*, but what remains certain is Bonnetain's support for the French colonial initiative. Like Renan and Ferry before him, his use of the concept of race would allow him to maintain a semblance of republican universalism while simultaneously reticulating into categories of inherent inferiority. Finally, in terms of the overarching question of the ways in which Bonnetain thought the French could civilize the Vietnamese, the evidence seems to suggest that, as did Nerval and Loti before him in various climes, Bonnetain reduces the subject population in Vietnam to its women, or at least to its feminine parts; for him the civilizing project seems to be primarily an undertaking in the interests of French men, the interests of the Vietnamese being generally all but ignored.



## 5. CONCLUSION

There is a fundamental conflict in Bonnetain's work that is as true of *L'Opium* as it is *Au Tonkin*: on the one hand he seems to be an intelligent, knowledgeable, and dispassionate observer, choosing to side with the Germans rather than the British for strategic reasons,<sup>292</sup> or, in *L'Opium*, describing the lives of French men and women in Tonkin, and the dangers of opium; on the other he is, more often than not, a pessimist who would himself become an opium addict, and a slave to his own fatalistic outlook. This dreariness combined with his exhaustive descriptions makes Bonnetain's work a bit of a slog at times. In the books considered in this thesis, his pessimism would be perhaps most apparent in *L'Opium*, a bulky novel which is largely consumed with the pessimistic ramblings of a disillusioned addict. As Greaves put it, "Opium symbolizes the spiritual dilemma with which Marcel Deschamps is faced. It is no accident that there are frequent references to Baudelaire and Schopenhauer and the philosophy of pessimism."<sup>293</sup> However, even in the journalism of *Au Tonkin*, Bonnetain would refer to Schopenhauer and the futility of resisting the cycles of history.<sup>294</sup> These conflicting strains of thought – pragmatism and pessimism – seem to represent the conflicting aspects of Bonnetain's character, a conflict which is suitably demonstrated by his thoughts on *métissage*: while his leftist sympathies encouraged a view which saw humanity as unified and perfectible through a "union for life," his strong anti-clerical and positivist sentiments would encourage a view which saw race as the chief determining factor in an individual's ability

---

<sup>292</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 195-200.

<sup>293</sup> Greaves, "Paul Bonnetain," 98.

<sup>294</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 41-42.

and willingness to become civilized. Race was both the fixed and distinct set of characteristics of a species on the hierarchical scale of polygenism (which miscegenation could only mask at best), and variations within a common species, beings the same as him.<sup>295</sup> His desire to populate Indochina with *métis* is a compromise between these positions – a way to both accept and extinguish the importance of race. Viewed as a whole, Bonnetain's life could be said to be a failed attempt to reconcile this compromise in his own philosophy of life: between the weight of his heredity and strength of his will. As David Baguley has noted of *Charlot s'amuse*, it is very pointedly shown that Charlot's suicide is the ultimate form of pessimism, in submission to his diagnosed hereditary condition,<sup>296</sup> and certainly the same thing could be said of Marcel. It would be hard not to see Bonnetain's suicide as the same form of submission, suicide being entirely an act of the will. As Daniel Pick has noted, the reassurances of science and progress were coupled with knowledge of the threat of degeneration wiping civilization out, especially French civilization, and Bonnetain's pessimism was very much a response to this dark side of progress.<sup>297</sup>

In terms of his views on civilizing the Vietnamese, Bonnetain was very much a pessimist: they are to be civilized by the gradual dissolution of their race through interbreeding – essentially by the reduction of their race to its women, leading to its presumed disappearance.<sup>298</sup> Vietnamese men are mentioned chiefly as laborers, soldiers, or criminals. Even in *L'Extrême Orient*, his reference work, there is a large drawing of a Vietnamese executioner beside the decapitated corpse of a "pirate," accompanied by an

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>296</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 111.

<sup>297</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 8-9.

<sup>298</sup> Bonnetain, *Au Tonkin*, 236.

edited version of the text that had been the eighth chapter of *Au Tonkin*.<sup>299</sup> However, it should be said that Bonnetain seemed at heart to view all of humanity, and nature as a whole, as malevolent: in a haze of opium, Marcel would characteristically lament that, “Des gens avaient lu Schopenhauer pour s’apprendre à mépriser la nature et les hommes, comme si vivre ne suffisait point à ce résultat [People had read Schopenhauer to teach themselves to mistrust nature and men, as though living didn’t sufficiently impart that conclusion]!”<sup>300</sup> This same attitude would dominate both the fact and the fiction of Bonnetain’s time in Tonkin, where the two principle sources of French authority and society – the Catholic Church and the military – were both offensive to Bonnetain’s liberal and artistic sensibilities.<sup>301</sup>

As we have seen, much of Bonnetain’s commentary in support of French colonial expansion in Indochina was closely tied to concerns with British overseas ventures. Edward Said has noted that, “In France, there was no one who, like Kipling, even as he celebrated the empire warned of its impending cataclysmic demise.”<sup>302</sup> Yet, what Laurence Kitzan has said about Kipling—that he was “virtually the only imperialist writer to make it into the serious works of literary criticism”—could well characterize Bonnetain.<sup>303</sup> And Bonnetain could be said to have foreseen the failure of the French mission in Indochina, though this was generally due to his criticism of the moral

---

<sup>299</sup> Bonnetain, *L’Etrême Orient*, 299.

<sup>300</sup> Bonnetain, *L’Opium*, 183.

<sup>301</sup> Greaves, “Paul Bonnetain,” 153-156.

<sup>302</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 207.

<sup>303</sup> Laurence Kitzan, *Victorian Writers and the Image of Empire: The Rose-Colored Vision* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 53. For examples of Bonnetain in serious works of literary criticism see: Paul Ginisty, *L’Année littéraire 1885* (Paris: E. Giraud, 1886), 145, 159, 165; J.-M. Gros, *Le mouvement littéraire socialiste depuis 1830* (Paris: Albin Michel), 307; William Leonard Schwartz, *The imaginative interpretation of the Far East in modern French literature, 1800-1925* (Paris: H. Champion, 1927), 126.

degeneration of the French in Indochina, a danger which the failings of the French military exacerbated. This illustrates perhaps the biggest difference between Kipling and Bonnetain: the British tended to “exclude the modern” when portraying the original inhabitants of those places they had colonized.<sup>304</sup> That is, they tried to accentuate both the cultural division between themselves and those they colonized, and the extent to which their own culture was both more advanced and more suitable for governing the nations in question. As Kitzan has said of the British victory over the Indian Mutiny, “the British won because they knew they were right.”<sup>305</sup> There is not this same sense of moral authority in Bonnetain’s work; as patriotic as his pro-colonial stance is, and as much as touted the imperial possibilities of métissage, it would be hard not to notice Bonnetain’s criticism of French society in Tonkin. The fundamental contradiction on which this criticism rests is to be found, microcosmically, in the character of Marcel: he is himself a degenerate who is sent to civilize the Vietnamese. To add to this metaphor, it is opium, which the Vietnamese (as Lamarckian products of their environment) are hardened to, which ultimately ends Marcel’s colonial experience, and his life. The French colonial experiment in Tonkin, which was intended to regenerate both the French and the Vietnamese “races,” was destined, in Bonnetain’s pessimistic view, to end in the regeneration of the Vietnamese through métissage, and the further degeneration of the French through contact with the “bastard” people of Vietnam and their insidious degenerative aspects. This recognition of the irony in expecting degenerate French colonists in Vietnam to civilize themselves, much less the Vietnamese, is generally

---

<sup>304</sup> Susan Bayly, *French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina* (*Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3. (July 2000)) 584.

<sup>305</sup> Kitzan, *Victorian Writers*, 50.

thought to be a novel aspect of Claude Farrère's *Les Civilisés* (1905).<sup>306</sup> A close reading of *L'Opium* would seem to suggest that Bonnetain was also well aware of this irony.

Bonnetain's importance as a writer is a case that has been made with regards to *Charlot s'amuse*, the work which has garnered him the most attention in recent scholarship, as a book which Baguley says deserves some serious attention from students of nineteenth century French literature.<sup>307</sup> Yee has written that *métis* were a subject which was largely taboo in the colonial literature of the period, yet they are prominent features in all of Bonnetain's writings about Tonkin, including *L'Extrême Orient* in which there is a full page devoted to a highly detailed drawing of "Une métisse d'Hanoi."<sup>308</sup> This frankness about *métissage* in itself makes his work on Tonkin an interesting and important resource for students of French colonial and racial ideologies in the period 1870-1914. Bonnetain is also important as the writer of the first Naturalist colonial novel, *L'Opium*. Both of these areas of significance – as a literary commentator on *métissage* and as a literary stylist – have only begun to be explored in this thesis. Both his books and articles considered in this thesis, and the remainder of Bonnetain's output dealing with colonial topics, are as yet largely unexplored documents that offer a potential wealth of insights into French ideas about race and imperialism in the early years of colonial expansion under the Third Republic. This thesis has attempted to show that, contrary to the official line adopted most famously by Ferry, the popular polygenic, secular conception of the Vietnamese never allowed for any question of the Vietnamese being civilized while they remained Vietnamese. For Bonnetain, only through the addition of

---

<sup>306</sup> Yee, "L'Indochine androgyne," 271; Claude Farrère, *Les Civilisés* (Paris: Flammarion, 1921).

<sup>307</sup> Baguley, *Entropic Vision*, 111.

<sup>308</sup> Bonnetain, *L'Extrême Orient*, 273.

French “blood” could the Vietnamese become civilized, for only then would they be biologically, and therefore culturally, French.

In terms of Bonnetain’s place in the canon of French colonial fiction, he was an originator, but not a very successful one. He died, as his father had, deeply in debt. Cousins and co-authors Marius and Ary Leblond, made the Naturalist colonial novel, the genre that Bonnetain had pioneered with *L’Opium*, famous.<sup>309</sup> Bonnetain’s work should be seen as representing a mid-point between the exoticism of Pierre Loti, which flatly refused to acknowledge the unity of the human race, and the later colonial novelists like Farrère and Maurius and Ary Leblond, who would openly question the supposed racial dominance of Europeans.<sup>310</sup> On another level, it could be said that Bonnetain, and his frank promotion of *métissage*, brought to bear the fundamental contradictions which existed between the universal and secular nature of French republicanism, and the racial determinism upon which the French imperial civilizing mission was founded.

---

<sup>309</sup> Their incorporation of Zola’s Naturalist technique into the colonial setting, eventually earned them a shared Prix Goncourt in 1909 for *En France*, a novel in which their two main characters are “Créoles” from the island of Réunion who have come to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. (Albert Schinz, “L’Année Littéraire Mil-Neuf Cent Trente-Deux,” *The Modern Languages Journal* 17, no. 6 (1933), 420; Marius-Ary Leblond, *En France* (Paris: Charpentier, 1910)]

<sup>310</sup> See, for example, Jean Suret-Canale, “À propos de Vigné d’Octon: peut-on parler d’anticolonialisme avant 1914?” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 18, no. 69 (1978).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Ageron, Charles-Robert. *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1978.

Andrew, C. M. and A. S. Kanya-Forstner. "The French 'Colonial Party': Its Composition, Aims and Influence, 1885-1914." *The Historical Journal* 14, no. 1 (March 1971): 99-128.

Baguley, David. *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Baum, Bruce. *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity*. New York: NYU Press, 2006.

Bernasconi, Robert, and Tommy L. Lott, ed. *The Idea of Race*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2000.

Betts, Raymond. *Tricouleur: The French Overseas Empire*. London: Gordon and Cremonesi, 1978.

Blanckaert, Claude. "Of Monstrous Métis? Hybridity, Fear of Miscegenation, and Patriotism from Buffon to Paul Broca,," In *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, edited by Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, 42-70. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Blue, Gregory. "Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the "Yellow Peril," and the Critique of Modernity." *Journal of World History* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 93-139.

Bonnetain, Paul. *Le tour du monde d'un troupier*. Paris: Dreyfous, 1882.

----- *Charlot s'amuse*. Brussels: Kistemaekers, 1883.

----- *Une femme à bord*. Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1883.

----- *Au Tonkin*. Paris: Victor-Havard, 1885

----- *L'Opium*. Paris: Charpentier, 1886.

----- *En mer*. Paris: J. Lévy, 1887.

----- *Le monde pittoresque et monumental: L'Extrême Orient*. Paris: Quantin, 1887.

----- *Le Nommé Perreux*. Paris: G. Charpentier, 1888.

----- *Amours nomads*. Paris: G. Charpentier, 1888.

----- *Passagère*. Paris: A. Lemerre, 1892.

----- *L'Impasse*. Paris: A. Lemerre, 1898.

Bourde, Paul. *De Paris au Tonkin*. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885.

Britto, Karl Ashoka. *Disorientation: France, Vietnam, and the Ambivalence of Interculturality*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

Bury, J.P.T. "Gambetta and Overseas Problems." *The English Historical Review* 82, no. 323. (April 1967): 277-295.

- Carter, A. E. *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958.
- Chaix-Ruy, Jules. *Ernest Renan*. Paris: E. Vitte, 1956.
- Chapuis, Oscar. *A History of Vietnam from Hong Bang to Tu Duc*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995.
- Chateaubriand, M. le Vicomte de. *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem, suivi des voyages en Amérique, en France, en Italie. Tome premier*. Paris: Krabbe, 1848.
- Clark, Linda L. "Social Darwinism in France." *The Journal of Modern History* 53 no. 1 On Demand Supplement (March, 1981): D1025-D1044.
- Conklin, Alice L. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Cooper, Nicola. *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*. Oxford: Berg, 2001.
- Craig, Edward, ed. *Nihilism to Quantum Mechanics*. Vol. 7 of *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Darwin, Francis, ed. *Charles Darwin: His Life Told In An Autobiographical Chapter, And In A Selected Series Of His Published Letters*. London: John Murray, 1908.
- Daughton, J. P. *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Dobie, Madeleine. *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism*. Stafford, California: Stafford University Press, 2001.
- Dommen, Arthur J. *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Dowbiggin, Ian. *Inheriting Madness: Professionalization and Psychiatric Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Duiker, William J. "Phan Boi Chau: Asian Revolutionary in a Changing World." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (Nov. 1971): 77-88.
- Dwork, Deborah, and Robert Jan Pelt. *Holocaust: A History*. New York: Norton & Company, 2003.



Eastman, Lloyd E. *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy During the Sino-French Controversy 1880-1885*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

Fahmy, Ziad. "Francophone Egyptian Nationalists, Anti-British Discourse, and European Public Opinion, 1885 – 1910: The Case of Mustafa Kamil and Ya'qub Sannu'." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 1 (2008): 170-183.

Farrère, Claude. *Les Civilisés*. Paris: Flammarion, 1921.

Ferry, Jules. *Le Tonkin et la mère-patrie*. Paris: Victor-Havard, 1890.

Fouillée, Alfred. *La science sociale contemporaine*. Paris: Hachette, 1880.

Gaillard, Jean-Michel. *Jules Ferry*. France: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989.

Garraway, Doris. *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Gobineau, Arthur de. *The Inequality of the Human Races*. Translated by Adrian Collins. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915.

----- *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, Deuxième Édition*. Vol. 1. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884.

Greaves, Anthony A. "Paul Bonnetain, his Life and Works." D. Phil. diss., University of Nottingham, 1965.

Hale, Dana S. *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples 1886-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Halliday, R. J. "Social Darwinism: A Definition," *Victorian Studies* 14 no. 4 (June 1971): 389-405.

Hargreaves, Alex G. *The Colonial Experience in French Fiction: A Study of Pierre Loti, Ernest Psichari and Pierre Mille*. London: The MacMillan Press, 1981.

Harris, Marvin. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1968.

Hutton, Patrick H., ed. *Historical Dictionary of the Third French Republic, 1870-1940*. Vol. 2. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Jourda, Pierre. *L'Exotisme dans la littérature française depuis Chateaubriand: Tome II Du romantisme à 1939*. Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1954.

- Kent, Christopher. *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978.
- Kitzan, Laurence. *Victorian Writers and the Image of Empire: The Rose-Colored Vision*. London: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Koos, Leonard. "Touchy subjects: naturalist influence and/or naturalist parody in Paul Bonnetain's *Charlot s'amuse*." *Excavatio* no. 13 (2000): 180-189.
- Krailsheimer, A. J. "Introduction." In Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goirot*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Lacousse, Magali. "Pierre Loti Marin." In *Loti en son temps: Colloque de Paimpol*. Renne: Presses Universitaires de Renne, 1994.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *L'homme et les sociétés : Leurs origines et leur histoire*. 2 vols. Paris: J. Rothschild, 1881.
- Lerner, Michael G. *Pierre Loti*. New York: Twayne, 1974.
- Leroy-Beaulieu, Paul. *De la colonization chez les peuples modernes*. Paris: Librairies Guillaumin, 1882.
- Loti, Pierre. *Pierre Loti de l'Academie francaise: Nouvelles et récits*. Edited by Guy Dugas & Alain Quella-Villéger. Paris: Omnibus, 2000.
- Loti, Pierre. "Propos d'exil." In Guy Dugas and Alain Quella-Villéger, ed. *Pierre Loti: Nouvelles et récits*. Paris: Omnibus, 2000.
- Nguyen Van Phong, *La Société Vietnamiennne de 1882 à 1902 d'après les écrits des auteurs français*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971.
- Mill, John Stuart. "A Few Words On Non-Intervention." In *Dissertations and Discussions: Political Philosophical and Historical by John Stuart Mill*. Vol. 3. New York: Henry Holt, 1882.
- *Principles of Political Economy, With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy*. Vol. 2. Boston: Charles C. Little & James Brown, 1848.
- Munholland, J. Kim. "The French Connection that Failed: France and Sun Yat-Sen, 1900-1908." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 32, no. 1 (Nov., 1972): 77-95.
- Nye, Robert A. *Crime, Madness & Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Pick, Daniel. *Faces of Degeneration: A European disorder, c. 1848-c.1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

“Politique Coloniale: Discours prononcé par M. Clémenceau à la Chambre des Deputés le jeudi 30 juillet 1885.” Paris: Bureaux du journal *La Justice*, 1885.

Power, Thomas F. Jr. *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Proschan, Frank. “EUNUCH MANDARINS, SOLDATS MAMZELLES, EFFEMINATE BOYS, AND GRACELESS WOMEN: French Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese Genders,” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 8, no. 4 (2002): 435-467.

Rainger, Ronald. “Race, Politics, and Science: The Anthropological Society of London in the 1860s.” *Victorian Studies* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 51-70.

Renan, Ernest. *La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*. Paris : Michel Lévy Frères, 1872.

----- *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882*. Paris: Calmann Levy, 1882.

Robinson, Christopher. *French literature in the nineteenth century*. New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1978.

Robiquet, Paul. *Discours et opinions politiques de Jules Ferry*. 6 vols. Paris, A. Colin, 1893-98.

Robson, Kathryn and Jennifer Yee, ed. *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005.

Rosenstone, Robert A. *Mirror in the Shrine: American Encounters with Meiji Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993.  
----- *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Schinz, Albert. “L’Année Littéraire Mil-Neuf Cent Trente-Deux.” *The Modern Languages Journal* 17, no. 6 (1933): 419-427.

Schoolfield, George C. *A Baedeker of Decadence: Charting a Literary Fashion, 1884-1927*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

- Schwartz, William Leonard. *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature 1800-1925*. Paris: Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927.
- Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no.4 (1991): 773-797.
- Shedd, William G. T. *A History of Christian Doctrine*. New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1871.
- Singer, Barnett and John Langdon. *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- Stromberg, Roland N. *European Intellectual History Since 1789*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994.
- Sullivan, Eileen P. "Liberalism and Imperialism: J. S. Mill's Defence of the British Empire." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (1983): 599-617.
- Suret-Canale, Jean. "À propos de Vigné d'Octon: peut-on parler d'anticolonialisme avant 1914?" *Cahiers d'études africaines* 18, no. 69 (1978): 233-239.
- Tancock, Leonard. "Introduction." In Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*. Translated by Leonard Tancock. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962.
- Taine, H. A. *History of English Literature*. Translated by H. Van Laun. Edinburgh : Edmonston and Douglas, 1873.
- Todrov, Tzvetan. *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Truong Buu Lam. *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000.
- Tucker, Spencer. *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, François-Marie Arouet. *Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 22. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1885.
- Watson, D. R. "A Note on Clemenceau, Comte and Positivism." *The Historical Journal* 14, no. 1 (Mar., 1971): 201-204.
- Wolpoff, Mildred, and Rachel Caspari. *Race and Human Evolution: A Fatal Attraction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.
- Wright, Gordon. *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present, Fifth Edition*. New York: Norton, 1995.

- Yee, Jennifer. *Clichés de la femme exotique: Un regard sur la littérature coloniale française entre 1871 et 1914*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000.
- "‘L’Indochine androgyne’: androgyny in turn-of-the-century French writing on Indochina." *Textual Practice* 15, no. 2 (2001): 269-282.
- "Métissage in France: a postmodern fantasy and its forgotten precedents." *Modern & Contemporary France* 11, no. 4 (2003): 411-425.
- Young, Robert J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Zeldin, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*. Vol. 2 of *France 1848-1945*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- Émile Zola. *Fruitfulness [Fécondité]*. Translated by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1900.
- *La fortune des Rougon* (1870)  
[http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola\\_Emile](http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola_Emile), 3. Accessed June 25, 2009.
- *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893)  
[http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola\\_Emile](http://ebooksgratuits.com/ebooks.php?auteur=Zola_Emile), 127. Accessed June 25, 2009
- *Thérèse Raquin*. Translated by Leonard Tancock. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962.